

# Video Watchdog®

the Perfectionist's  
Guide to  
Fantastic Video

No. 99  
\$6.50



## LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT

LORD OF THE RINGS!

ICE AGE on D-VHS!

Joe Dante on Ken Russell!

TAPES • DVDs • SOUNDTRACKS • BOOKS

\$6.50 U.S. / \$9.50 CANADA





LON CHANEY

IN

LONDON  
AFTER MIDNIGHT

MARCELINE DAY and CONRAD NAGEL

A TOD BROWNING PRODUCTION

A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer PICTURE

Story by TOD BROWNING  
Scenario by WALDEMAR YOUNG  
Titles by JOE FARNHAM  
Directed by TOD BROWNING





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Fantastic Video

No. 99 / SEP 2003

"It's now actually easier to break into films  
than into their packaging."

—Dennis Miller, *THE RAW FEED*

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You've asked for it, so VW inaugurates the dreaded "Double Dog Dare"—a new, occasional department wherein two critics challenge one another with contrasting opinions of a single film! In this round, Richard Harland Smith and Kim Newman beg to differ about Brian Yuzna's *SOCIETY*!

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Inside: Original 1927 poster art from *LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT*.

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# KENNEL

**ANTHONY AMBROGIO** acknowledges that he has an (undeserved, as far as he can tell) acknowledgement in FORGOTTEN HORRORS 3, but that's not why he likes the book.

**RYAN BAKER** is an outstanding student in Gary D. Rhodes' film studies class at the University of Oklahoma.

**JOHN CHARLES** is one of the contributors to ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA: A GUIDE TO HONG KONG, TAIWANESE AND MAINLAND CHINESE CINEMA, due from Simon & Schuster at the end of 2003.

**BILL COOKE** wants to know if everywhere people put their feet up on the seats in movie theatres, or if it's just a southern thing.

**SHANE M. DALLMANN** is working on a new movie called **THE WOODEN GATE**, featuring Jim Van Bebber.

**JOE DANTE** has read over 1,000 pages of the MARIO BAVA: ALL THE COLORS THE DARK manuscript and says there has never been anything like it.

**TIM LUCAS** is currently assisting Donna with the Bava book layout and working on his next novel.

**KIM NEWMAN** will be spending a week living in early 19th Century conditions for a UK TV docu-drama series THE REGENCY HOUSE, staging a gothic drama in a mansion in the wilds of Hertfordshire.

**GARY D. RHODES** is the author of WHITE ZOMBIE: ANATOMY OF A HORROR FILM, and the editor/contributor of HORROR AT THE DRIVE-IN: ESSAYS IN POPULAR AMERICANA, both among the best film-related books published by McFarland and Company. This issue marks his first VW appearance.

**RICHARD HARLAND SMITH** recently interviewed the daughter of Juan-Lopez Moctezuma for the forthcoming book VAMPIROS AND MONSTRUOS: THE MEXICAN HORROR FILM OF THE 20TH CENTURY (Midnight Marquee Luminary Press).

**REBECCA & SAM UMLAND** are still watching INVADERS episodes—and paying extra close attention to the pinkies of everyone they meet.

**DOUGLAS E. WINTER's** biography CLIVE BARKER: THE DARK FANTASTIC was nominated in the Nonfiction category of this year's International Horror Guild Awards.

## VW THANKS & PHOTO SOURCES:

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**ARTWORK:** Charlie Largent (cover), Pete Fitzgerald (8). **LOGO & COVER FORMAT:** Radomir Perica (International Design Studio, Bethesda MD).

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# THE WATCHDOG BARKS



## PUBLISHING THE 99<sup>TH</sup>

issue of a magazine is less a milestone than a prelude to a milestone. It's too soon to discuss the road that lies ahead, but it's just the right time to reflect on the steps which have brought VIDEO WATCHDOG this far.

What a long, strange trip it's been, as they say. Looking back, I can see that VIDEO WATCHDOG existed in the air before Donna and I were conscious of it. I wrote "The Trouble with TITIAN"—my investigation into how Rados Novakovic's *Operacija Titian* became Jack Hill's unreleased **BLOOD BATH** and, subsequently, the released version of **BLOOD BATH** co-signed by Jack Hill and Stephanie Rothman and, finally, its lengthened TV version, **TRACK OF THE VAMPIRE**—without having any notion of where such an extended piece might find a home. That article was too long and uncommercial to have appeared anywhere else at the time; in fact, it took us three issues before we could figure out how to best present it in VW, which was only 64 pages in those days. (It finally ran in VW #s 4, 5 and 7.) Writing that article broke many of the laws I had to observe when writing for other magazines, and the pieces I wrote subsequently, "How to Read a Franco Film" (VW #1) and "**GANJA & HESS**: The Savaging and Salvaging of an American Classic" (VW #3, co-written with David Walker), came more easily and after VW had been conceived. All these issues later, one of the greatest joys I still derive from VW is the feeling of being completely possessed by an article and free to drive it to the ends of the earth. This has been especially rewarding in cases like my three-part Andy Milligan article (VW #s 52-54), which felt like a crazy indulgence as I was working on it, but became a highlight in our publishing history and, much to my own chagrin, precipitously raised the value of Milligan memorabilia being auctioned on eBay!

Due to financial necessity, and the desire to establish a voice and stance for this magazine, I wrote most of our early articles myself. But another great pleasure afforded by VW has been the nurturing of new talent—like Anthony Ambrogio, John Charles, Shane M. Dallmann, Charlie Largent, Richard Harland Smith, Nathaniel Thompson and Brad Stevens, all of whom have since become published authors or have book projects currently in the works.

I've also been able to play host to some of the most outstanding writers and researchers in the fields of film and video: Lucas Balbo, Stephen R. Bissette, Michael F. Blake, Lorenzo Codelli, Max Allan Collins, David Del Valle, Dennis Fischer, Ken Hanke, Paul M. Jensen, Alan Jones, David Kalat, Mark Kermode, Bill Krohn, Craig Ledbetter, filmmaker Michael Lennick, Gregory William Mank, Don May, Jr. (now with Synapse Films), David J. Schow, filmmaker Paul Talbot, the late Alan Y. Upchurch, Marc Walkow (aka "Walter Marcus," now with Criterion), Bill Warren, Tom Weaver, Bret Wood—and, of course, Joe Dante, Kim Newman, Douglas E. Winter and Rebecca & Sam Umland, all of whom we're proud to count among our regular contributors. And how many letters columns can claim of roster of past contributors that includes Vincent Price, Christopher Lee, Richard Gordon, Oliver Stone and Ramsey Campbell, as VW's The Letterbox can? I'm bound to have left some names out, and I apologize to everyone I've overlooked, but this list wasn't meant to be definitive. And my memory isn't what it used to be, back when movie-related trivia and train-spotting was "just a hobby."

But, without question, for me, the best part of my years with VW has been working at the side of the person I love most. As many of you know, Donna and I publish VW out of our home and this has been a mixed blessing; people who set their own business hours usually don't, and it's not an uncommon occurrence for us to work till dawn, in order to deliver a new issue to the printer by Monday morning, only to have the telephone start ringing at 8:30 am. Donna has perfected the art of sounding, on the phone, like she's awake 24 hours a day... and there are periods when she really is. We see each other at our worst, but the nature of our relationship also allows us to see each other at our best. If VW was "just a business," it probably wouldn't have lasted this long, but it's a marriage, too. Ours.

Donna, the Kennel and I want to extend a big, warm "Thank You" to everyone who's helped to bring VW to this brink of occasion—and that includes you, our dedicated, responsive readership. Whatever you do, don't miss the 100th issue of VIDEO WATCHDOG, which arrives in stores next month—and bound to fly off the racks just as fast! Wait till you see what we have in store!

• • • • • Tim Lucas



## WATCHDOG NEWS

# ICE AGE on D-VHS

Could This Be the  
Ice Age of DVD?



*By Rebecca & Sam Umland*

### ICE AGE

2002, 20th Century Fox  
Home Entertainment,  
DD-5.1/MA/16:9/LB/ST/CC/+,  
\$29.98, DVD-1

### ICE AGE

20th Century Fox  
Home Entertainment,  
DD-5.1/16:9/LB/CC/+,  
\$34.98, 80m 39s,  
D-VHS (Region 1)

DVD aficionados should not yet consider VHS a moribund format, as Victor Company of Japan (JVC)—the company that originally developed the VHS format in the 1970s and won the war against Sony's Betamax format—has reinvented VHS again with its introduction of Digital VHS (D-VHS) video. With the tape's high definition picture clarity and the D-VHS player's backwards compatibility (meaning it

will play both S-VHS and VHS tapes), D-VHS is a way—until HD-DVD or some other HD format hits the market—to get high definition transfers of films into the hands of home video enthusiasts and collectors.

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*Three animals, all species doomed to extinction, pool their energies to return a lost human child to his family in ICE AGE.*



Fox's high definition VHS tape of **ICE AGE** has been touted as the first full-digital animated release on home video, transferred directly from the high definition digital source. Fox can make this claim because unlike video transferred to DVD, video on a D-VHS tape is uncompressed, with a data transfer rate of 28.2 Mbps—even better than HDTV broadcasts. So, while DVDs of films such as **TOY STORY** are transferred from an HD digital source, the video is subsequently compressed onto a DVD. D-VHS tape has over twice the resolution of DVD: coupled with the D-VHS resolution of 1080i, the 480 presentation of a DVD looks mediocre by comparison. Several Hollywood studios are supporting D-VHS, because it makes video copying off the Internet impossible: an hour of D-VHS, for instance, would require about 150 GB of hard disc space. For the moment, anyway, D-VHS is to DVD as the laserdisc was in the '80s and '90s to conventional VHS, and thus D-VHS, like the LD before it, probably has a limited shelf life.

Most certainly, 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment chose a wonderful film with which to premiere the new D-VHS format. Despite its title, **ICE AGE** is a warm and endearing film, perhaps the most compelling and inventive animated feature released in recent years. Amid the frozen landscape of the Ice Age (historically, about 20,000 years ago, thus a long, long time after the dinosaurs), there is a vast southern migration of mammals. One who prefers *not* to go south with the others, but rather *north* by himself, is a lone, laconic woolly mammoth named Manfred ("Manny," the voice of Ray Romano). Manny

happens to meet the gregarious Sid (John Leguizamo), a lisping, lovable but slightly slow-witted sloth who has apparently overslept and missed his kin's southward trek. Meanwhile, a pack of saber-tooth tigers seeking revenge on the humans who have killed half of their pack raid a village with the intention of devouring the village leader's infant child. Its mother escapes with the infant, but she dies when the baby is rescued from certain death by Manny and Sid. One of the pack of saber-tooth tigers, Diego (Denis Leary), craftily joins the two and is enlisted to lead them to Glacier Pass, the location where the baby's father and his fellow villagers are most certainly headed. Although Diego pretends to act as a guide, he secretly plans to rendezvous with the members of his pack. Reunited, the tigers will slaughter Manny and Sid and devour the child. But Diego did not count on becoming the friend of Manny and Sid—or the child—and after Manny saves him from certain death, Diego is faced with a daunting ethical dilemma: remain loyal to his pack, or defend those who have shown him love and friendship.

**ICE AGE** is not a film that appeals to young viewers only. It features a cinematic plot that has been a crowd-pleaser for many decades, from John Ford's sentimental Western **3 GODFATHERS** (1949), filmed several times prior to Ford's version (including by Ford himself), to the Leonard Nimoy directed **3 MEN AND A BABY** (1987), a Hollywood remake of the highly successful French film, **3 hommes et un couffin** ("Three Men and a Cradle," 1985). The plot in these films consists of three bachelors who are suddenly faced with the

duties of parenthood. As in these earlier films, some of **ICE AGE**'s funniest and most endearing moments revolve around the inexperience of the three males who must raise a helpless baby. Despite its considerable humor, **ICE AGE** enjoys a thematic complexity that rivals some of Disney's best animated features: like **THE LION KING**, for instance, it explores issues related to responsibility and power, the *angst* of losing a family and forming new bonds with others; and the importance of overcoming both instinct and grudges in the face of genuine good will. In spirit, **ICE AGE** is closer to John Ford's use of the theme of three men who by chance (or fate) become the parents of a child. Although the scenario can be played for laughs, Ford used it as a means through which the men achieved a form of redemption. Both Manny and Diego have their own internal battles to face, and the outcome will surprise even the most jaded viewer.

Acting as a kind of musical refrain to the core narrative action of the film—the quest by the odd-numbered trio to return the human baby to his father—is the ongoing activity of a single-minded saber-tooth squirrel named Scrat (a fictitious creature whose name is an amalgam of "squirrel" and "rat"), who is on his own unusual quest: to retrieve and bury, in the snow-covered world, a single acorn. In ensuing sequences, various characters battle over a single dandelion and later three watermelons, to underscore the fact that this is, indeed, the Ice Age. Although the character of Scrat has taken on a life of its own and become quite popular, in the audio commentary included on the DVD, co-director Chris Wedge indicates that





*Diego and Sid are remarkably lifelike CGI creations on DVD, but remarkably moreso on D-VHS.*

the creature—a sort of Ice Age version of the accident-prone Wile E. Coyote in the Road Runner cartoons—was not in the original script. The opening scene, in which Scrat's attempt to bury an elusive acorn causes a glacial crack that precipitates an avalanche, was added because Wedge believed a film about the Ice Age needed to start with tons and tons of ice and snow. The adventures of Scrat are a brief but recurring motif in the film; his quest for the acorn stretches over many millennia, and becomes the closing bookend for the film. As in Chuck Jones' Warner Bros. cartoons, Scrat's Sisyphean struggle to bury the elusive acorn is strongly analogous to the hapless Wile E. Coyote's never-ending pursuit of the Road Runner; his pursuit of the desirable object leads him to

perform many perilous acts. **ICE AGE** also owes a debt to the Warners cartoons featuring Bugs Bunny (and to television hits like *THE ODD COUPLE* and, more recently, *SPONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS*), as a number of the jokes have a homosexual subtext played for laughs, clearly designed to appeal to adults. Several of these jokes involve the relationship between Manny and Sid. Manny admits that his abundance of hair makes him look "poofy," and insists, early on in their friendship, that there is no "we" or "us," denying his growing affection for the irresistible Sid. Later, during their trek towards Glacier Pass, the group settle in for the night, and Sid asks for a good-night kiss. When Manny replies that the baby is already asleep, Sid retorts, "I was talking to you."

We compared the picture on Fox's **ICE AGE** DVD issue with that of its D-VHS issue using our JVC HM-DH30000U Digital Recorder/Player connected to our 51" Sony KP-51HW40 that receives 1080i, 720p, 480p and 480i digital TV formats. We found the picture on the D-VHS to be much better than the one on the DVD, good as it is. Although we have often remarked on the sharp, vivid picture quality of most DVDs, frankly, we found that the DVD image cannot compete with that of a D-VHS tape. With its razor-sharp background detail and better contrasts, the picture on the D-VHS version of **ICE AGE** actually appears three-dimensional (as do the snowflakes) and thus more life-like, enhancing our appreciation both of the superbly drawn animal characters and the world of the Ice Age as




imagined by the filmmakers—a stark, barren, but strangely beautiful world that is the desert landscape of the Road Runner cartoons become ice and snow. We found the DD-5.1 soundtracks to be comparable, however. Both are crisp and nicely detailed, with excellent directional effects. Although we haven't seen films such as Disney/Pixar's **TOY STORY** or DreamWorks/PDI's **SHREK** in home video format except on DVD, most certainly the CG animation of Blue Sky Studios rivals that of these studios. Both of Fox's issues of the film contain, as a bonus, the amusing short animated film starring the popular Scrat character, "Gone Nutty" (4m 45s), but this is the D-VHS's sole supplement, and it is placed on the tape after the feature film presentation. We assume most viewers share our disdain for having to fast-forward a tape to find any added features or bonus materials, and this is certainly a major downside to the D-VHS format in the days of instant access to DVD menu options.

Fox's 2-disc DVD set of **ICE AGE** comes loaded with bonus materials, and the D-VHS issue (with its higher list price) just can't top these extras—or the convenience of access. The feature is included on Disc 1, which allows the viewer to choose between full-frame or widescreen formats, as well as the directors' commentary; the first disc also includes three games as well as DVD-ROM content, which unfortunately we could not access on our Mac G3. Although we prefer the widescreen format on our 16:9, the full-frame presentation is also quite acceptable. The commentary by co-directors Chris Wedge and Carlos Saldanha (the latter is given sole director

credit for the bonus short "Gone Nutty") emphasizes the technical aspects of the production. Both seem to have been trained in the fine arts, as they stress the importance they placed on lighting the various scenes (Wedge indicates that during the creation of the animation software at Blue Sky, they employed engineers to help them develop the proper lighting values) and also stress the importance of line and form. They also admit to the one story formula they used throughout the film, which was that any serious scene had to be followed by humor and slapstick in order to take the edge off. In short, the directors' commentary isn't humorous or condescending, but matter-of-fact and highly informative, especially about the formal and technical aspects of the production.

The many complexities of producing an animated film are explored in the extensive bonus materials on Disc 2, which includes a 27m "Making of" that is actually quite interesting. Wedge reveals that he was approached by Fox executive Lori Forte (the film's producer) to make **ICE AGE**, a project she had initiated and was developing. Wedge, who received an Oscar in 1998 for the unusual short feature "Bunny" (7m 17s, included as one of the bonus materials on the second disc), accepted the project because, in his words, "No one had been there"—that is, visited the Ice Age on film; thus, the story presented him with some creative opportunities. Various technical aspects of the production are also included in the "Making of" documentary, including brief segments exploring the many stages of the animation process. Also available is the 14m "Behind the Scenes" that originally aired

on HBO, which includes footage of Wedge directing the actors who provided the voices of the central characters. Also included are six deleted scenes totaling 8m 24s. Two of the six (about 2m total) were removed after feedback from test audiences, and one 59s scene is actually unfinished, but is included to show why the segment wasn't necessary to tell the story. The disc also includes three different trailers, each about 2m 20s; an amusing 2m 50s segment titled "International Ice Age" that consists of a clip repeated in eight different languages; a sequence titled "Sid on Sid" consisting of a tongue-in-cheek John Leguizamo as Sid the Sloth discussing various scenes from the film; design galleries; an animation progression showing how a character moves from sketches on paper to becoming fully animated on screen; and more. The feature film has Spanish subtitling available, as well as the French and Spanish soundtracks in stereo surround.

Out of curiosity, we also took a look at a couple more of the roughly two dozen titles currently available on D-VHS, Fox's **FIGHT CLUB** (1999; VW 65:46) and **BEHIND ENEMY LINES** (2001), and compared them with the DVD transfers. As we expected, the picture quality on both was superior to those on DVD, although, curiously, the D-VHS of **FIGHT CLUB** was not on par with either **ICE AGE** or **BEHIND ENEMY LINES**, revealing a slight bit of grain as well as being a tad dark. Neither of these randomly chosen titles had any bonus materials. Two films previously reviewed in VW, **TERMINATOR 2: JUDGMENT DAY** and **INDEPENDENCE DAY** have also been issued on D-VHS, but we were unable to obtain them for review. 





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## The Film Bulletin Reviews, 1969-1974

### THE BEAST IN THE CELLAR

Offbeat but talky, plodding melodrama about elderly sisters and their guilty secret. Well-acted and tries to be different, but doesn't work. OK where doubled with **BLOOD ON SATAN'S CLAW**, very minor potential on its own. Rated R.

Despite some game trouping by, of all people, Flora Robson and Beryl Reid, the certifiably offbeat **BEAST IN THE CELLAR** doesn't quite make it as either horror or drama. Writer-director James Kelly has structured his rather odd plot in such a way that it quickly becomes repetitious and talky without building much in the way of suspense. What's more, the new title gives away the whole game at the outset. The original title, *ARE YOU DYING YOUNG MAN?* was far better suited to the essentially Victorian melodramatics. Where paired with the better **BLOOD ON SATAN'S CLAW**, the British-made Cannon release will do alright, but most audiences will find it strained and uninvolved. Miss Robson and Miss Reid are a pair of old maid sisters living in the isolated family house in rural England. The gruesome murder of a soldier at a nearby army camp is laid to an animal-like creature which the tea-sipping, bickering sisters are mysteriously in the know about. In fact, it lives in their cellar and escapes periodically to knock off military types. The bulk of the film is taken up with tea-time parlor conversations, interspersed with a few more killings. Finally Miss

Reid tells the police everything—mainly that the creature is the dear brother whom she and Miss Robson walled-up in the cellar before World War II to prevent his enlisting and ending up shell-shocked and disfigured like their WWI vet father. In context, it's not quite as silly as it sounds, thanks to the acting, but the aimed-for poignancy is minimized by a disjointed mixture of styles, some of them stagily effective in the direction of the flashbacks. The murders, though infrequent, are suitably bloody, and strong-stomached horror buffs will particularly enjoy a shot in which Miss Reid thoughtfully adjusts an eye dangling from a victim's socket. Even so, the R rating is surprisingly strict. The two stars, to their credit, do not simply walk through their parts with a disdainful air, but endeavor to do their best with generally untractable characters. Miss Reid, especially, is well into the **ARSENIC AND OLD LACE** mood required to bring it off, but the final appearance of mad brother, all hairy, filthy and wild-eyed, effectively polishes off whatever dramatic momentum has been achieved. Tony McCaulay's music is rather good. The print viewed ran 11 minutes under the listed 100.

1970. Cannon Releasing Corp. (Tigon British-Leander Films). Color. 88 minutes. Flora Robson, Beryl Reid, John Hamill, Tessa Wyatt, T.P. McKenna. Produced by Graham Harris. Directed by James Kelly.

*THE BEAST IN THE CELLAR* was issued on tape in the mid-'80s by Paragon Video and again in 1989 by Cannon Video. There was also a Canadian release from CIC Video. The short running time cited by Joe is standard for the domestic version.





*Boris Karloff presents a deadly antique for the edification of Mark Eden in **THE CRIMSON CULT**.*

## THE CRIMSON CULT

Boris Karloff triumphs over mad scientist Christopher Lee and cult queen Barbara Steele in clumsy horror entry made engaging by the stars. Satisfactory dualler for the chiller markets. Rated GP.

When two superior artists like Boris Karloff and Christopher Lee get together, the product has to be something to lure horror fans and this clumsily produced AIP release, advertised as Karloff's final appearance, will satisfy them simply because its stars are in such fine form. It will serve quite adequately in those markets traditionally receptive to this type of fare. Because Karloff made many distinguished films since **FRANKENSTEIN** (1931), it is rather a pity that his likely swan song (two production plagued Mexican features with the star have thus far been unable to find distribution and the Spanish **CORPSE COLLECTOR** seems to have vanished) is in a creaky, low-budget vehicle. Yet it is somehow appropriate that **THE CRIMSON CULT** relies solely on the polished performers for its effectiveness. Karloff made so many penny dreadfuls in his long career that this is the sort of thing those

who watch old movies on TV most closely identify him with. No matter how bad his material or the direction, Karloff's artistry usually made it all seem worthwhile—a tradition that Christopher Lee is continuing today in horror quickies. **THE CRIMSON CULT** is hardly one of their better vehicles. It does not even have the advantage of a professional looking production, the photography being so poor that many of the scenes seems to have been lit by candlelight and the processing by Movielab runs the color spectrum from sepia to ink black. What redeems the film is the privilege of seeing the two kings of horror, past and present, inspired by each other and apparently having a very good time. They know when to parody the dreadful dialogue, when to play the cornball situations for thrills, and there is one priceless brandy sipping sequence that appears totally improvised by Karloff to provide the film with a genuinely classic moment. The incidental story has Lee attempting to get revenge against the descendants of those who burned Miss Steele for witchcraft three centuries before. He seems to think that he is her reincarnation. Mark Eden and Virginia Wetherell are the unworthy young lovers whom Karloff eventually rescues from Lee's sadistic clutches. "I always knew he had a split mind,"





Accused sorcerer Father Grandier (Oliver Reed) confronts the demented Sister Jeanne of the Angels (Vanessa Redgrave) in Ken Russell's *THE DEVILS*.

Karloff explains nonchalantly. It really doesn't matter that the script by Mervyn Haisman and Henry Lincoln is completely mindless, or that the direction by Vernon Sewell is inept. The stars, ably assisted by Miss Steele and Michael Gough in cameo roles, can handle themselves and they make everything else irrelevant.

1969. **THE CURSE OF THE CRIMSON ALTAR**. AIP. Color by Movielab. 89 minutes. Boris Karloff, Christopher Lee. Produced by Louis M. Heyward. Directed by Vernon Sewell.

As we now know, there were four Mexican Karloff vehicles, not two, awaiting the release they would eventually receive, and the Spanish-made "CORPSE COLLECTOR" was later given a US release under the title **CAULDRON OF BLOOD**. The only US video releases of **THE CRIMSON CULT** (supposedly based on H.P. Lovecraft's "Dreams in the Witch House") have been on the HBO Video label in VHS, and on HBO/Image Entertainment laserdisc (as a co-feature to **THE HAUNTED PALACE**)—both under the original title **THE CURSE OF THE CRIMSON ALTAR**. This version runs 2m longer, including more nudity and black magic rituals. This bonus was turned to a minus when the original score by Peter Knight (disappointing in the first place) was replaced on video with a new score by Kendall Schmidt, whose budget must have run out as the fiery climax was given no music at all, making the scenes play as nakedly as a high school stage production. For a time, this longer cut was shown on US premium cable channels with its original score intact; alas, in the past year, these same channels have taken to showing **THE CRIMSON CULT**... with all the old cuts back in place!

## THE DEVILS

Hysterical account of sex and sadism in 17th Century Church is too horrendous and excessive for any but specialized markets. Has exploitation value for ballyhoo audience and may intrigue segments of youth and art crowd. Rated X.

Even at his most bizarre and undisciplined, writer-director Ken Russell commands attention, if not respect, and there's never a dull moment (to say the least) in **THE DEVILS**, his latest and wildest contribution to filmdom's often weird outline of history. This frenzied, literally incredible and very nearly insane melange of depraved priests, debauched exorcists, cheerfully fiendish tortures and masturbating sado-masochist nuns who flay themselves with maces is, as must now be obvious, not for every taste. Indeed, most audiences will be inclined to view the whole affair as a wretched excess, and any unfortunate religious souls who should happen to wander in on it will be offended to their very marrow. Nevertheless, an audience does exist for **THE DEVILS**, and it's not composed entirely of crazed atheists and drooling would-be witch-burners. In addition



to the merely curious and sex seekers drawn by the X rating, urban youth and art trades may be intrigued by the Warner Bros. release's stylishly orchestrated hysteria, while its grimmer sensational aspects make it a likely contender in horror and drive-in ballyhoo markets. Considering the morbid nature of much of its contents, a surprising amount of the film is perversely funny in a not altogether unintended way. In fact, apart from some of the more obviously heavy speeches, it seems likely that Russell viewed his apparent aim of shocking the unshockable with something akin to gleeful relish. He never misses an opportunity to exploit the most grotesque aspects of his material, usually in a horrifically tongue-in-cheek manner. Based loosely on Aldous Huxley's novel and John Whiting's play (chronicling actual events which may or may not have happened this way), the film casts Oliver Reed as a rakish 17th century priest who gives up a life of sexual abandon to settle down, more or less, with his true love (Gemma Jones), whom he marries in a somewhat unorthodox ceremony conducted by himself. Hunch-backed nun Vanessa Redgrave (given to visions of carnal relations with Reed-as-Christ, and praying to Jesus to "take away my hump") concocts some jealous lies about Reed which enable his political enemies (backed by Cardinal Richelieu) to mount a mass exorcism, condemning Reed and ending the independence of Loudon. Poor Miss Redgrave is subjected to an orgy of torture which culminates with the injection of some vile boiling liquid into her vagina. In a scene which must set several precedents, the painted entourage of gay king Graham Armitage visits the church where nude nuns run screaming through the vestibule and Twiggy, of all people, can be glimpsed in the background munching on a lollipop. After more wrenchingly brutal torture, Reed is finally burned at the stake, blistering and boiling away before our eyes, as the city is pulled down around him. The performances are all pretty florid, though Reed is remarkably effective and noble throughout. Miss Redgrave cackles, leers and sweats her role away, and Max Adrian is fine as a genial mad torturer. Dudley Sutton, Michael Gothard and Murray Melvin are appropriately evil villains. David Watkin's photography is consistently first-rate. Though cuts have obviously been made, the X rating still seems somehow appropriate.

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1971. Warner Bros. Technicolor, Panavision. 109 minutes. Oliver Reed, Vanessa Redgrave. Produced by Ken Russell and Robert H. Solo. Directed by Ken Russell.

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*There have been numerous video releases of **THE DEVILS**, all thoroughly documented in VW 35. The most complete is a cropboxed PAL VHS release from Warner Home Video in Britain, which was released after the publication of that issue.*

## GOD FORGIVES—I DON'T

Italian western (dubbed) imitates "Dollars" series, with only mild success. But has enough violence to satisfy action devotees. Rated M.

Reportedly a big success in its native Italy, where it doubtless satisfied the same audience which went for the spear-and-sandal actioners, this English-dubbed Western should draw okay returns in action houses and drive-ins. However, the many stateside fans of the better Sergio Leone-Clint Eastwood entries will find this pretentiously titled American International release thoroughly derivative; primarily a potpourri of action scenes, many copied shamelessly from the successful "Dollars" films, and staged without much artistry, conviction, or point of view. Anti-hero Terence Hill looks and acts as much as humanly possible like Clint Eastwood, right down to the cheroot and serape, but lacks Eastwood's presence, or any of his own, and remains a thoroughly uninteresting character. Director-writer Giuseppe Colizzi seems incapable of infusing the haphazard goings-on with any spark of his own, though **GOD FORGIVES** does have the distinction of having what must be the first fight scene in which the outnumbered hero triumphs over his adversaries while hanging headfirst from the ceiling; but there is none of the elegiac poetry or atmosphere of the Leone films. Alfio Contini's photography, interiors of which often look like they were shot through a smoke screen, is not nearly as stylish as that of its models, and the music's halfhearted attempt at copying Ennio Morricone's "Dollars" scores succeeds only in being dreary. The jumbled story is the usual parade of tortured bodies, slit throats, knives in the neck, branded chests and broken bones, and eventually becomes an unwitting parody of itself. Loner Hill joins forces with insurance investigator Bud Spencer to track down desperado Frank Wolff, who killed a trainload of passengers during a robbery. Hill and Spencer locate the loot and move it to a desolate hiding place, but they are captured by Wolff's gang and tortured. They escape without talking, and eventually Hill and Wolff face each other in a showdown, but with an added twist: Hill lights a dynamite fuse leading to the money. Hill shoots Wolff in both wrists and both knees, forcing him to crawl frantically to extinguish the fuse, which blows him up. Hill and the wounded Spencer divvy up the money, having cleverly moved it beforehand. Whenever things start to drag, which is pretty often, the actor



nearest the camera gets shot, or beat up, or stabbed. The dubbing is good, considering the quality of the dialogue.

1967/69. *Dio perdona... io no!* American International. Berkey Pathé, ColorScope. 101 minutes. Terence Hill, Frank Wolff, Bud Spencer, Gins Rovers. Produced by Enzo D'Ambrosio. Directed by Giuseppe Colizzi.

The only currently available official release of this title is a German DVD (in German language only), entitled *Zwei vom Affen gebissen*, which means something like "Two Halves of an Ape." A Danish DVD in English with removable Danish subtitles is now out of print. English-language copies are known to circulate on the grey market.

## KISS AND KILL

Tame, dull Fu Manchu reprise destined for lower slot playoff. Rated M.

Commonwealth United is giving no indication in its advertising that **KISS AND KILL** actually documents the latest (1968) exploits of Sax Rohmer's inscrutable Oriental archfiend Fu Manchu—a wise move, in that Fu's last vehicle, which received a few second-feature bookings in a dimly-processed B&W version, was of so vapid a nature as to have probably dried up the Fu Manchu market for all time. Once the secret is out, however, **KISS AND KILL** will make a passable lowercase dualler for drive-in and action grind-house situations. Originally titled **THE BLOOD OF FU MANCHU**, this Harry Alan Towers production is thrice removed from the quality of the initial entry in the current series, Don Sharp's 1965 **FACE OF FU MANCHU**, a deft and inventive item which featured tongue-in-cheek scripting, deadpan performances and charming period detail. This fourth in the series is extremely feeble by comparison, without a hint of humor, intentional or otherwise. Christopher Lee seems to be wearying of his Fu Manchu role, and the same can be said of Tsai Chin as his daughter, the cunning Lin Tang. Supporting performances exhaust the range from wooden to stodgy. An aging Richard Greene has little to do as Fu's implacable adversary, Nayland Smith, and Shirley Eaton, billed as "Black Widow," is briefly glimpsed in what amounts to a gratuitous cameo. Having once again survived being blown up in the previous picture, Fu Manchu is still plotting to dominate the world, operating from an underground lair lined with wriggling semi-nude girls hanging from their wrists, situated in what a title card identifies as "a remote jungle in South America." This time he plans to dispatch ten none-too-attractive girls to implant the kiss of death upon his enemies, having had them injected with a snake poison which causes blindness and death. Greene, blinded by the poison,

travels to the jungle to meet his agent Gotz George, who is on Fu's trail. Fu captures homicidal bandit chief Richard Palacios, whose scurvy band supplies some yawn-worthy raping and pillaging, to lead Fu's Red Guard-type minions in capturing members of Greene's party. After more of the same, Greene finally is cured by a dubious mingling of blood with one of the poisoned slave girls, and Fu's stone headquarters explodes in nonsensical but time-honored style, thwarting his enterprising plans once more. Director Jess Franco at least tries to vary the angles, but can't breathe any life into Peter Welbeck's soporific, monotonous screenplay, nearly every major speech in which is punctuated by a gong. Manuel Merino's camera never moves when it can zoom, and dull, grayish color processing is no help. The distressing lack of imagination and effort which characterizes this film is a disservice to characters which have provided, in other hands, some classically amusing hokum, and makes Fu's usual final pledge, "The world shall hear from me again" sound more ominous than ever.

1968/69. *Fu Manchu y el Beso de la Muerte*. Commonwealth United (A Udastex Production). Eastman Color. 91 minutes. Christopher Lee, Richard Greene. Shirley Eaton, Tsai Chin. Maria Rohm. Produced by Harry Alan Towers. Directed by Jess Franco.

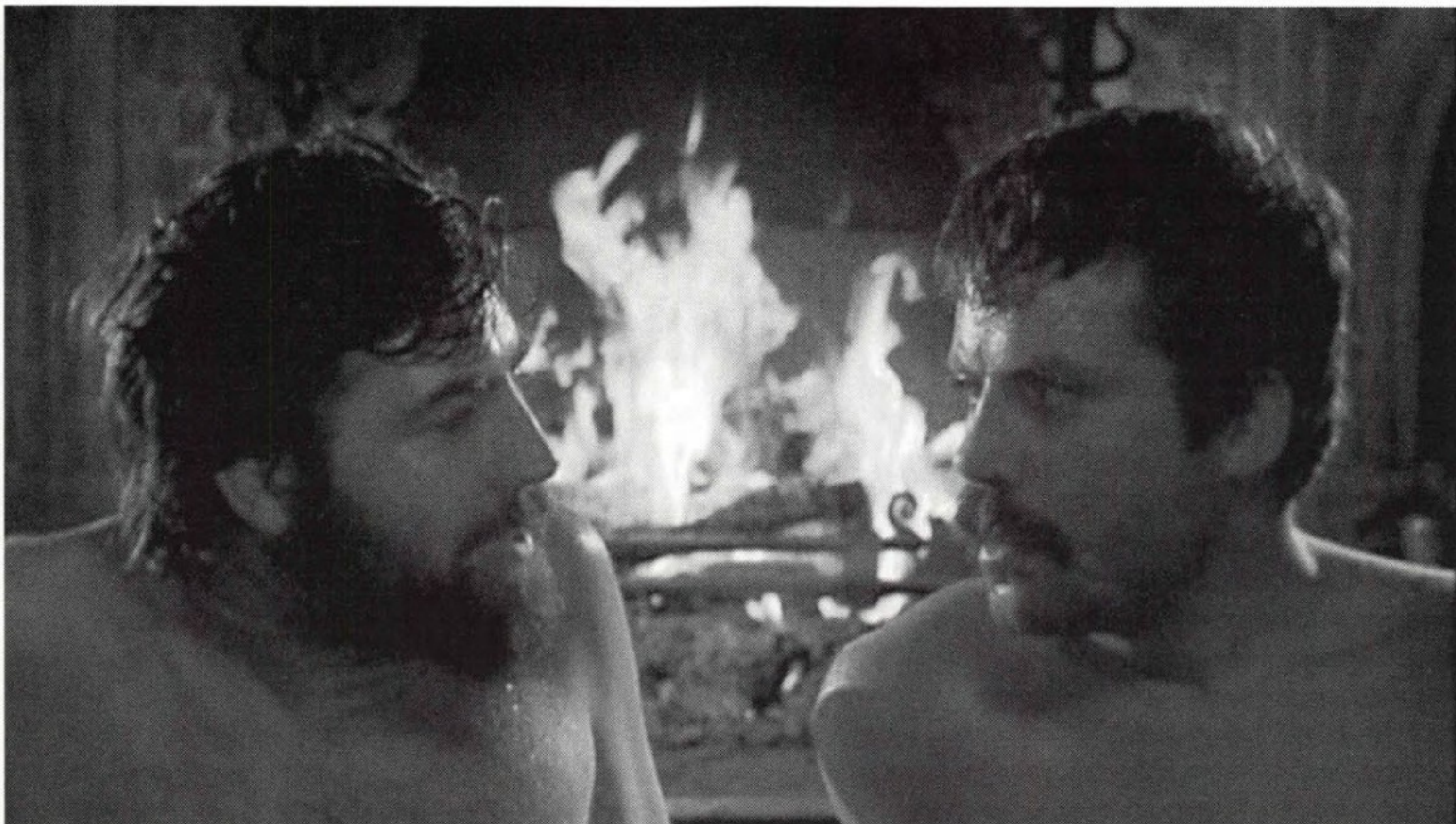
This film has been released on video in the US under various titles and in various versions—**AGAINST ALL ODDS** (Republic Video), **KISS OF DEATH** (Bingo) and even **FU MANCHU AND THE KISS OF DEATH** (label unknown)—none of them complete. Later this year, Blue Underground will be releasing a fully restored, widescreen version of this film under the title **THE BLOOD OF FU MANCHU**.

## WOMEN IN LOVE

Beautifully filmed D.H. Lawrence adaptation should lure intellectual art-house audience, despite unsatisfying aspects. Might also do fairly well in some sophisticated suburban situations. Rated R.

**WOMEN IN LOVE**, which has been described as a film about the 1916 D.H. Lawrence novel rather than of it, may not satisfy whatever Lawrence devotees are still extant, but the British-made United Artists release may very well prove to be a fascinating and stimulating diversion for those sophisticated filmgoers who are more interested in filmic expression than they are familiar with the original source. Former BBC-TV director Ken Russell, whose last film was the stylishly hysterical **BILLION DOLLAR BRAIN**, has constructed, in conjunction with producer-screenwriter Larry Kramer, an uneven, meticulously detailed and continually interesting progression of tantalizing





*Alan Bates and Oliver Reed in a suitably elemental shot  
from Ken Russell's exemplary D.H. Lawrence adaptation, WOMEN IN LOVE.*

scenes which, if they do not add up to a fully satisfying experience, make the two-hour journey a memorable one. Prospects for art houses and sophisticated suburban markets look good, but the Lawrentian polemicism which pervades the dialogue, and occasionally threatens to turn the characters into mere symbols, is likely to induce disinterest among audiences in mass markets. The proceedings include some complete male nudity which may generate controversy, but since those scenes are tastefully handled, this angle is hardly conducive to sexploitation. The core of the film is formed by the relationship between Alan Bates, a free-spirited, non-conforming schoolteacher supposedly representing Lawrence himself, and Oliver Reed, as an emotional, melancholy industrialist who is destroyed by his inability to love. Their respective romantic involvement with sisters Jennie Linden and Glenda Jackson ends in marriage—a successful but strangely unfulfilled union for Bates and Miss Linden, and bitterness and tortured despair for Reed and Miss Jackson, which culminates in Reed's death. Although it deals ambitiously with the variations of intense love, emotional freedom and the industrial revolution, the film is most notable on a visual level. Billy Williams' mobile camera imparts a tactile quality to the varied physical terrain, and apart from one excessively lyrical slow-motion love interlude, this is one of the most stunningly shot films of recent

years. Although Russell's direction is occasionally eclectic, it is always riveting, even at its most misguided. Such scenes as the death of Reed's father, the drowning of his newlywed sister and her husband at a family picnic, and Reed's own icy demise in the glistening snows of the Zermatt have a freshness and force to them which is totally independent of the book. The all-important nude fireside wrestling match between Bates and Reed is carefully presented, with none of the self-consciousness which usually attends such landmark explicitness. Ken Jones' art direction and Kramer's production capture the period so strikingly it can almost be tasted. Bates and Reed excel in roles which seems tailored to their talents, while Miss Jackson gives the best film performance of her career. Miss Linden is natural and completely believable, and the excellent supporting cast includes Michael Gough, Alan Webb, Catherine Wilmer and Sarah Nicholls. Eleanor Bron caricatures an already broad role as a pompous intellectual interested in Bates. George Delerue's music is scored with intelligence and dramatic effect.

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1969. United Artists (A Brandywine Production). DeLuxe Cclor. 129 minutes. Alan Bates, Oliver Reed, Glenda Jackson, Jennie Linden. Produced by Larry Kramer. Directed by Ken Russell.

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MGM Home Entertainment recently released **WOMEN IN LOVE** on DVD, with audio commentary by Ken Russell and writer/producer Larry Kramer.







# In Search of LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT

By Gary D. Rhodes & Ryan Baker



**I**T'S AMAZING how much nostalgia we can develop for a time or place we've never known; that we can feel a connection, even a kind of memory, for something we've never witnessed or seen. Film history is an area in which this seems particularly true. Collectors own movie posters or even personal effects of film celebrities, in hopes that physical material will act as a kind of time machine, transporting them by the sense of touch and sight into a world they never lived through. Some film viewers "know" Chester Conklin or Franklin Pangborn or George Zucco better than many of those actors' own relatives would.

But the envelope of nostalgia is pushed even further with the subject of lost films. The list of casualties in this category is lengthy; the most commonly-cited statistic suggests that more than 50% of films made before 1950 have vanished. That we can develop an extreme interest, a fascination—even love—for a film we haven't seen is puzzling. But, thanks to the traces left behind—still photographs, fleeting memories of audience members who did see the movie—the puzzle pieces can be assembled into a coherent picture, a wish-memory of something we've never actually known.

For many of us, Tod Browning's MGM film **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT** (1927), starring Lon Chaney, isn't *quite* lost: it's merely missing in action. Year after year in the 1960s and 1970s, magazines like *FAMOUS MONSTERS OF FILMLAND* regularly reprinted still photographs from this mythic movie to the degree that Chaney's vampire makeup may be more visible in our minds than the teachers we had in grade school or the fellow who walked in front of us at high school graduation. Those of us who haven't seen the film seem to know a great deal about it, or at least about its memory.

It was the first major foray made by the US cinema into the topic of vampires, even if the bloodthirsty characters in the film were proven in the last reel to be fakes. It was an indication—so at least some versions of the story go—that Browning and Chaney possessed an interest in Bram Stoker's novel *DRACULA*.

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*"Gotcha!" The Man in the Beaver Hat (Lon Chaney) seems to say in this atmospheric shot from the legendary lost film, LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT.*

Surviving photographs of **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT** suggest some amazing lighting effects and makeup design. The film *must* be good, or so we believed in paging through horror movie magazines. It *looks* so good. Chaney's makeup alone, with its beaver hat, jagged teeth, sunken cheeks, and bulging graveyard eyes, confirms the film as important.

However good or bad it might have been, **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT** is, at best, a convoluted mystery and, at worst, a confusing array of narrative events mired with hole after hole in its plot. Given that it is a lost film, we must reconsider what we do know about the story.

It is the apparent suicide of Roger Balfour (Claude King) that sparks the events of **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT**. Professor Burke (Chaney) arrives on the scene, where he finds Balfour's daughter Lucille (Marceline Day) and Sir James Hamlin (Henry B. Walthall). Five years pass and Lucille falls in love with Arthur Hibbs (Conrad Nagel), Sir James' nephew. Now in the care of Sir James, Lucille lives in Hamlin Hall, adjacent to the crumbling edifice of the Balfour estate, which is now being leased by a mysterious stranger who signed the contract with the name "Roger Balfour."

At the same time, Burke returns to check up on Sir James and further investigate the Balfour situation. Though there are suspicions of vampires and ghouls, Burke dismisses them as "tommy-rot." Burke's skepticism is soon dashed when there is not only an attempt on his life, but also a successful abduction of Lucille. Apparently, the vampires—a male known as "The Man in the Beaver Hat" (Chaney) and a female (Edna Tichenor) known as "The Bat Girl"—are the culprits.

Both Hibbs and Sir James leap to save Lucille. Hibbs discovers, however, that Burke plans Sir James to relive Roger Balfour's "suicide" under hypnosis and therefore establish his guilt. The ruse works: Burke reveals himself as both a Scotland Yard investigator and the man in the "Beaver Hat" disguise. He apprehends Sir James, leaving Lucille and Hibbs to inherit the Hamlin estate and marry. Their happy ending is coupled with the revelation that no real vampires exist.



**T**he mysteries surrounding the film have served only to pepper it with greater mystique. For example, who was Chaney's co-star Edna Tichenor? Though we know of her other few film roles (such as **THE MERRY WIDOW** of 1925 and **THE SHOW**, also directed by Browning, of 1927), she is specifically remembered for a film we can't access and a role she cannot play for posterity. But those photographs, the stills of her as the Bat Girl! We remember those stills of her approaching actress Marceline Day, a scene that may not have even been in release prints at all.

Of course, part of our fascination is founded on desire, a voyeuristic desire to view, to witness something we can't see. The more we can't have something, the more we want it. To be sure, when some of these lost silents are rediscovered and issued on video—from Edison's **FRANKENSTEIN** (1910) to much of the horror film output of the 1920s—they don't sell in large numbers. For years, still photographs of other lost films like **THE MAGICIAN** (1926) and **SEVEN FOOTPRINTS TO SATAN** (1929) were equally fascinating to circles of horror film fans, and now that bootleg VHS copies of both are in circulation, they hardly cause a murmur.

**LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT** tops many lists of the most sought-after lost films, including the American Film Institute's Top Ten List, yet the film wasn't always highly praised on its original release. The *NEW YORK TIMES* (December 31, 1927) called the film "somewhat incoherent" and *VARIETY* (December 14, 1927) believed it would "add nothing to Chaney's prestige." *TIME* magazine (December 26, 1927), on the other hand, suggested positively that "...it is well worth squirming about," while *THE WASHINGTON POST* (January 1, 1928) acclaimed it as a "super melodrama" that "seethes with dark superstition, eerie adventure, and awe-inspiring black magic." It's seemingly as easy to find as many positive reviews as negative ones.

To determine what audiences thought of **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT** is a difficult task. After all, audiences are not monolithic or permanent; they are fragmentary and short-lived coalitions. Viewers seated side-by-side may have simultaneously loved and hated the film, and audiences on different days in different cities may have had widely varying responses. But to at least begin a look at this issue, we can turn to original theater manager reports that specifically refer to audience responses. What did they say about the film? A few examples include:

- "First money maker since last April and this run off in the middle of hot August. People evidently like Chaney. Play good, very good. The title did not fit but pshaw [sic]!" (Rex Theater in Salmon, Idaho, reported on September 29, 1928)
- "The best Lon Chaney has made for some time. Comments very good from our patrons." (Bloomer, Wisconsin; October 20, 1928)
- "Good as Lon Chaney has made yet. This is the best of his releases since **THE BLACK BIRD**. Mystery entertainment through all seven reels. Give us more like it, Lon." (Royal Theatre, Kimball, South Dakota; November 17, 1928)
- "Extra good Chaney picture that drew us the best Saturday night crowd we [have] had in a long time." (Bonny Theatre, Mansfield, Missouri; December 15, 1928)
- "My people enjoyed two delightfully fearful evenings with this spooky, awesome thing." (Pastime Theatre, Mason, Michigan; July 14, 1928)
- "Very good mystery, but we found about 50 percent of our patrons thought it fine, balance just as much the other way." (Ne-Go Theatre, Toronto, Kansas; September 29, 1928)

If critical and viewer-based reactions yield varying responses, another point of contention is **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT**'s generic characteristics. After all, we need to reconsider exactly what kind of film it *is* that we're so interested in. Noted film historian and Chaney biographer Michael F. Blake has suggested, "A lot of people used to say it was a horror film. It never was a horror film. The ads I have billed it as a detective thriller, and that is what it is." And to be sure, a survey of the 1927 press book advertisements and those actually published in city newspapers directly echo Blake's description. At the same time, ads for films are often deceptive, and this is particularly true in a pre-1931 period when films with "horror" content were rarely advertised with such a genre-specific adjective.

We can turn to other critical reviews to give a broader view, such as poet/critic Carl Sandburg's in the *CHICAGO DAILY NEWS* (January 9, 1928). "For the major portion of this new Tod Browning





*Tod Browning directs Lon Chaney and the mysterious Edna Tichenor (as the Bat Lady).*

story, Lon is the mysterious man hunter and crime solver, but along about the middle of the picture he takes on another role, a minor one, but a part that outdoes for sheer terror anything even he ever saw in a looking glass. This secondary role is that of a squat and bat-like little man in a high hat and an awful face who hangs around a haunted house."

Both of these immediately suggest that we could consider **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT** a detective thriller, but would have to give at least a nod to its decidedly horrific content—at least based on what a few critics said. As for audiences, the following theater manager reports also suggest that some viewers (or at least the theater

managers watching them) found horror content within the picture:

- "A good show of mystery, horrors, and excitement. Did not please so well on that account. Not a good show for children. Play it if you like this type of picture." (Majestic Theatre, Homer, Michigan; July 21, 1928)
- "My people enjoyed two delightfully fearful evenings with this spooky, awesome thing." (Pastime Theatre, Mason, Michigan; July 14, 1928)





*As midnight approaches with its legion of horrors, Professor Burke (Chaney) offers meager comfort to Lucille (Marcelline Day).*

**W**hat do these quotations and the entire debate reveal? Not much more than what we learn from examining most books on the horror film, particularly volumes like Phil Hardy's *OVERLOOK FILM ENCYCLOPEDIA: HORROR* (Overlook, 1994) or George Turner & Michael Price's *FORGOTTEN HORRORS* (Oak Tree, 1979). One viewer's horror movie is another viewer's mystery, Western or sci-fi film. And studio publicity and theater ads aren't necessarily helpful in making generic/narrative classifications.

To help further clarify some of these issues, we can turn to specific persons who saw the film and commented on it in later years. While it's true that oral histories can be problematical in terms of reliable memory, we can at least hear the voice of experience. For example, film enthusiast George Mitchell wrote in a 1953 *FILMS IN REVIEW* article on Chaney that **LONDON** was an "expertly made thriller." And Forrest J. Ackerman once proclaimed that "**LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT** was probably Chaney and Browning's greatest film together."

And yet, H.A.V. Bulleid, another viewer of the film's original release, has said, "One tends to get very excited about lost films. I think people would be very disappointed if they saw **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT**. I didn't enjoy it nearly as much as **PHANTOM [OF THE OPERA, 1925]**." Furthermore, in *CLASSICS OF THE HORROR FILM* (Citadel, 1974), William K. Everson wrote: "In view of the legend surrounding [**LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT**] and the apparent current impossibility of refuting it by actual evidence, protestations that the ...film wasn't actually a very good film have been futile."

Later, on a visit to Fort Worth in 1990 for a lecture at the Amon Carter Museum, Everson recalled his own impressions of actually screening the film: "It tried too hard to intersperse comedy with the thrills." He also suggested that **MARK OF THE VAMPIRE** (1935) was a better movie.

**MARK OF THE VAMPIRE** was Tod Browning's own sound remake of **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT**. Made at MGM studios, the film used the same basic storyline but split the Chaney role into



two parts: Professor Zelen (Lionel Barrymore) and Count Mora (Bela Lugosi). It generated some strong critical reviews at the time and at some theaters garnered impressive grosses. It also scared some viewers tremendously; one doctor even wrote to the *NEW YORK TIMES* in 1935 expressing fear that a film such as this could wreak real havoc on audience nerves.

More than anything else, viewers in recent decades have generally felt disappointment when watching **MARK OF THE VAMPIRE**. Whether praising the sets and lighting or not, whether discussing the stark and rich B&W photography, or whether appreciating Barrymore, Lugosi, and Carroll Borland (as Luna, taking Edna Tichenor's part as the Bat Girl) or not, viewers often start and end conversations about the film with regret that its narrative concludes with the vampires shown to be a hoax. That the Supernatural is not really in play greatly bothers today's audiences.

Curiously, the very factor that disappoints many **MARK** viewers was the very thing of which Browning was apparently most proud. Though Chaney

apparently never talked about **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT**, Browning did—on at least one occasion. It was in a discussion with George Geltzer, author of a 1953 *FILMS IN REVIEW* essay on the director. Geltzer wrote that, “[Browning] cited **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT** as an example of how to get people to accept ghosts and other supernatural spirits by letting them turn out to be the machinations of a detective. Thereby, Browning remarked, the audience was not asked to believe the horrible impossible, but the horror possible, and plausibility increased, rather than lessened, the thrills and chills.”

Whatever Browning intended with **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT**, we still aren't apt to undergo the experience. Critical reviews, theater manager reports, audience member comments, **MARK OF THE VAMPIRE**—all of these factors merely get us thinking about what we can't see. The desire increases, creates rumors, and then feeds the desire again.

After all, where could a print of **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT** possibly be? As the oft-told story

*Prof. Burke is later revealed to be a disguise for Inspector Burke of Scotland Yard, seen here minus his makeup in the company of Sir James Hamlin (Henry B. Walthall).*





goes, MGM did possess a copy, which was last inspected in 1955, and then was destroyed in a vault fire in 1967. MGM then did a worldwide search for the film in the 1970s, but came up empty-handed. And if not in their hands, where could it be? The mind boggles.

Rumors have been in play now for many years. The idea that a collector, somewhere, owns the film but is withholding it until MGM's copyright expires seemed to pass by word-of-mouth in the late 1980s and early 1990s and persists to the present day. At other times, one or two collectors have proclaimed ownership of the film, presumably to curry favor and interest at film conventions. No proof is ever given, no print is ever unveiled.

Internet hoaxes have also played off the intense interest in the film. April Fool's jokes have included online claims of broadcasts of the film on Turner Classic Movies. But perhaps the most elaborate and fun hoax was the "**LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT**—Found!" article on Joseph K. Meadows' "Horror-wood.com" website, which

claimed that "Clyde McGuffin, 82, one-time Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer film archivist and now the owner of a chicken ranch in El Segundo, California, found a valuable 'nest egg' in an actual chicken's nest." Despite chicken droppings, the report claims, the print of **LONDON** is "watchable." Amazingly, even though Meadows' item was clearly marked as a "horror hoax," it was later discussed in online horror chat rooms as though the discovery were real.

Perhaps the most unusual, yet tangible, excitement about the film in recent years came from the news that a home movie patterned after **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT** had been rediscovered. The home movie itself—which was not actually affiliated with the real Lon Chaney or MGM—finally surfaced on Something Weird Video's **MONSTERS CRASH THE PAJAMA PARTY** DVD [VW 81:20]. While a fascinating homage, the home movie is far less a revealing look at **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT** than the mystique built up around it suggests. Though not a hoax, the home

*Inspector Burke demonstrates his powers of "mesmer-ism," which warranted the film's original title of THE HYPNOTIST. His subject is Arthur Hibbs (Conrad Nagel).*





movie is of an indeterminate age and origin. Whatever is or isn't intriguing about it, the intense anticipation for it a few years ago illustrates how strong the desire is to see **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT**, if only through the lens of a mere imitator.

Resigning themselves to the fact that **LONDON** is at least *temporarily* lost, several parties have attempted what would normally be dubbed "reconstructions." After all, there are those existing still photographs, by varying counts 200 to 600 shots, and these might provide the visual basis for hopes of sating our desire. If you can't see the film, why not recreate it?

**T**he first modern "reconstruction" of **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT** came in print form from Cornwall Books in 1985. **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT** by Philip J. Riley used the original shooting script and a cutting continuity to reassemble the film with still photographs found at MGM, the Forrest J Ackerman collection, and (presumably) other sources. His text also offered a Foreword by Ackerman, an introduction by MGM unit art director A. Arnold Gillespie, a reprint of the **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT** pressbook, and a short production history of the film. The shooting script (entitled **THE HYPNOTIST**, dated July 16, 1927, and listed as a "2nd version") was also reprinted in full.

Riley also reproduced the dust jacket from Marie Coolidge-Rask's 1928 hardcover book edition of **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT** (printed in the US by Grosset and Dunlap, and in England by Reader's Library). In a sense, Coolidge-Rask's novelization may have been the first attempt to reconstruct the film, offering as it did a fictional interpretation of the film's scenario and a smattering of photos typical of the Grosset and Dunlap style. Riley's print-based reconstruction is sort of a hyper-visual counterpart to the Coolidge-Rask book, even a (perhaps unintentional) tribute to it.

Oddly and unfortunately, Riley reprinted only a brief sample of something else he had in hand: the film's cutting continuity, though he himself explained that a large number of differences could be found between it and the shooting script. Presumably, his 72-page reconstruction accurately and completely conveys the changes from script to cutting continuity. And yet, he admits in his text that not enough stills were available to support some of the story elements. So his version may not truly illustrate the cutting continuity, if restrictions were imposed by the limitation of existing still photographs.

Regardless, the book received a flurry of interest among horror film fans and some strong reviews, even though it appeared prior to the horror fan magazine explosion of the early 1990s. The sheer effort, the amount of still photographs amassed, and the production information fascinated many readers. Most buyers of the book questioned by the present authors had no qualms about the integrity and faithfulness of Riley's reconstruction, for the simple reason that they never read it. In the 18 years since it was published, used copies of Riley's **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT** (originally priced at \$24.50) now command \$125-150.

After the publication of Riley's reconstruction, hope persisted that the film itself would turn up, that some mysterious, unnamed collector would step forward and screen it for the world. But nothing happened on that front, despite rumors of a last surviving print existing, despite rumors of "at least six minutes" existing, and despite rumors about rumors.

**A** new round of Internet gossip started in early-to-mid 2002, claiming that Turner Classic Movies intended to broadcast the film during the Halloween season. For once, there was a grain of truth. The station would air the film, but in the form of a reconstruction by Rick Schmidlin, who had supervised Universal's 1998 reconstructed "director's cut" of Orson Welles' **TOUCH OF EVIL** (1958) and TCM's 250m "stills restoration" of Erich von Stroheim's **GREED** in 1999. "Will it include any footage from **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT** at all?" became the next logical question, but the answer was to be a disappointing "No."

Prior to its premiere broadcast on October 31, 2002, TCM announced that "It will be the first time the film has been seen in nearly 50 years in any format, as the last print known to exist was destroyed in a vault fire at MGM in the 1960s. ...Though no actual film footage is known to exist, award-winning filmmaker/archivist Rick Schmidlin has been able to faithfully reconstruct the entire narrative through an extensive collection of more than 200 still photographs and a complete continuity script."

What Schmidlin assembled was a visual reconstruction, much like Riley's, but in video form. That is, it consisted of moving images—static still images given movement by means of fluid rostrum moves—with musical accompaniment. "After I did **GREED**," Schmidlin told the **LOS ANGELES TIMES**, "I was trying to figure out what to do next."



The most doable project I found was **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT**, because I felt I had proved with **GREED** [that] I could use still photographs.”

The use of still photographs to recreate missing film footage was an established process even before Schmidlin’s work on **GREED**. Giorgio Moroder’s 1984 restoration of **METROPOLIS** (1927) helped popularize the idea, using a still photograph of an automobile ride to replace missing narrative information. And RCA/Columbia Home Video’s 1987 restoration of **LOST HORIZON** (1937) also used still photographs to replace some irrecoverable footage. Schmidlin’s work on **GREED** went far beyond these prior efforts, with 40% of the result built solely out of stills. With **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT** he took the process to an even greater extreme.

To help ground the **LONDON** project historically, Schmidlin turned to Michael F. Blake, noted makeup artist, film historian, and author of three critically acclaimed books on Lon Chaney. Upon learning of Blake’s involvement, the horror boards online immediately embraced the reconstruction as having historical merit.

Recently, Blake recalled of the process that “[Schmidlin] had access to all the photographs. We sat down and literally the whole movie is in all these photos. We got the original cutting continuity (the shot-by-shot record) and he also had the original intertitle continuity for the final print, and by using them, we could pretty much say this is the way the movie was when it went out. I think, at 48 minutes, it moves perfectly.”

Schmidlin’s film “moved” thanks to editor Christopher Gray, and included music by composer Robert Israel, well-known to movie buffs for his recent silent film scores, ranging from **Les Vampires** (1915) and **Dr. Mabuse, Der Spieler** (1922) to **THE FRESHMAN** (1925) and **THE GENERAL** (1927). He had earlier worked on a score for the outstanding Chaney film **TELL IT TO THE MARINES** (1926).

Schmidlin’s major photo resource became the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences’ Fairbanks Center in Beverly Hills, culling needed images from some 200 stills. Interestingly, however, some stills exist among collectors that Schmidlin either did not find or chose not to use.

In terms of what the photographs added up to, Michael Blake recently remarked “It gives us a basic *idea* of the film, making clear (hopefully) what the plot was about. That is basically it. You certainly cannot judge whether a film was good or bad by something like this [reconstruction].”

And yet what the film is even about remains at times unclear, perhaps due to the inherently complex/disjointed 1927 narrative. By watching the Schmidlin restoration, for example, we don’t ever really learn why Inspector Burke has resorted to the vampire disguise. Nor do we understand why photographs show Burke with much darker hair in photographs pertaining to the end of the film, and with gray hair earlier because his initial disguise as “Professor Burke” is not indicated at all.

Schmidlin’s intertitles also lack the crucial visual cue that viewers were originally given to make clear whose voice it conveyed: a moving mouth. While not necessarily a problem in close-ups, a conversation using multiple stills and showing more than one actor in a single photo occasionally confuses our understanding of who is supposed to be speaking which line. Thus, aside from the inherent story problems, the use of still photographs created even more narrative questions and frustrations.

Narrative gaps also occurred where still photographs didn’t exist or perhaps were never taken. For example, as Miss Smithson (Polly Moran) recounts her harrowing escape from the Man in the Beaver Hat, the script describes the vampire’s transformation into fog, materializing on the opposite side of a locked bedroom door. Though stated in the script and rendered in Riley’s pictorial, no effort is made to recreate the fantastic effect in the TCM reconstruction.

Furthermore, the dearth of stills limits our capability to observe the Bat Girl’s flying sequence, which is discussed in the script as well as remembered in Riley’s interviews. Peering through the windows of Balfour Hall, Burke and Sir James gaze upon the giant form of a bat circling the high ceilings—only to realize it is the mysterious Bat Girl. One still of actress Tichenor slightly suspended in midair must suffice for this entire sequence. Perhaps the effect was achieved optically in post-production, like the flying sequence in **MARK OF THE VAMPIRE**, and thus could not be photographed by the on-set stills photographer.

For viewing purposes, most audiences are more apt to think about the images we *do* see, rather than those we don’t. And what we do see in the Schmidlin version is often repeated out of necessity, with some entire scenes reconstructed

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*In what was likely the horror highlight of the film, a mist pours through the keyhole of Lucille’s room and materializes into the beaver-hatted vampire, who tries sinking his teeth into the neck of Miss Smithson (Polly Moran).*











by cutting back-and-forth between the same two or three photographs. Such repetition was inescapable with only 200 stills on hand, but it imposes a lack of fluidity on some scenes that were likely built out of more shots or camera moves.

To help add a kind of motion picture feeling and extend time length out of single images, digital rostrum moves were used extensively. But these moves, when they occur, have such a pristine smoothness about them that they only serve to remind us that Schmidlin's restoration isn't a film *per se*, and certainly not a vintage one. Whatever **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT** might have been, sensuous camera moves and zooms certainly would not factor into it.

As Michael Blake realized, "The *biggest* limitation is that the project does not *move*. No matter how much panning, zooming, etc., you do, it can *never* recreate a moving image. You are looking at stills. In Rick's version of **GREED**, he was lucky. He had moving footage he was able to cut back to, that kept things moving and gave the film a better flow."

Outside of THE LOS ANGELES TIMES and mention on the "Ain't It Cool News" website, there was interestingly little written about Schmidlin's **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT** immediately before and after its unveiling, which occurred at a live October 2002 screening at the famed Italian silent film festival in Pordenone and then, days later, on TCM's Halloween broadcast.

Film historian Tom Weaver posted a response to the film online, suggesting that: "Believe it or not, the darn thing works—and it was interesting to see that there's a bit less emphasis on the 'vampires' than in **MARK OF THE VAMPIRE**. Obviously, the success of **DRACULA** emboldened Browning and MGM to play up the monsters in that later version (which even begins with a **DRACULA**-like scene of tourists being warned away from the castle); in **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT**, the spooky angles don't turn up 'til mid-movie, and therefore there's a bit of an out-of-left-field feeling to them."

Praise also came from the Classic Horror Film Boards of America Online (AOL), which in January 2003 gave a "Rondo Award" to **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT** for the best restoration of 2002... though it did tie with the recent Alpha-Omega version of **METROPOLIS**, released in the US through Kino on Video.

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*Cedric Gibbons' atmospheric art direction clearly points the way to the look of Tod Browning's epoch-making DRACULA of 1931.*

But reaction among viewers at large was mixed. A scan of postings on the Internet Movie Database ([www.imdb.net](http://www.imdb.net)) and various online horror boards yields such comments as:

- "The Turner Classic Movies recreation of this 'lost' classic was unbelievably well done."
- "Considering the circumstances, TCM did a wonderful job of recreating the story and drawing the viewer in with the music, zooming in on pictures, and cross-cutting."
- "I hate to be a dissenting voice, but I was disappointed. I appreciate the effort, but... many plot issues remain hazy or unexplained, and I found it a bit numbing to see entire scenes constructed from no more than two stills, shot over and over... It seems to me that Philip Riley's book included some shots not accessed by Rick Schmidlin—the opening shot of Roger Balfour, dead on the floor behind his desk, for example."
- "[I] was totally disappointed. Dull, long (even at 50 minutes) and just the same stills over and over again."
- "While this version does give a feel for what they film may have looked like, ultimately it's the difference between getting a sniff of something that smells delicious while walking past a restaurant and going inside and sitting down to a gourmet meal."

Much like the original audiences and critics in 1927, the reborn **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT** caused a wide array of positive and negative feedback.

As this article is being finished in March 2003, the IMDB shows a current 4.4 out of 10 rating for the 2002 TCM restoration, with a 6.7 out of 10 rating for the 1927 original—which few, if any, of the voters is likely to have seen. "Perhaps it's better that it remains lost," offers one observer. While the original film continues to do exactly that, Schmidlin's reconstruction is set for an October release on DVD, as part of an MGM boxed set of Lon Chaney titles, including **THE UNKNOWN** (1927), **THE ACE OF HEARTS** (1921), **LAUGH, CLOWN, LAUGH** (1928) and Kevin Brownlow's outstanding documentary **LON CHANEY: A THOUSAND FACES** (2000).



**A**nother **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT** resurrection has occurred since the Schmidlin film premiere, via the World Wide Web. Horror website CelluloidShockers.com offers their own unique “reconstruction” as created by webmaster Paul Davis, with the site proclaiming it to be “the most comprehensive reconstruction” available. Yet the format of the construction presents a fundamental problem: expository information and scene description is intermingled with title card text/dialogue.

This particular version includes a reference to Burke as being “just back from India” at the time of his introduction to the Hamlin household. This is representative of the apparent ambiguous identity of Burke; while the script has him introduced as “Colonel Yates,” the photographs in Riley show “Inspector Burke—Scotland Yard,” and the TCM reads “Prof. Edward C. Burke—Private Investigator—London.”

There is no concrete explanation for the “Yates” moniker; it is believed that earlier drafts had Burke either undercover as an old friend of Sir James, or as an entirely different character altogether. The Coolidge-Rask novelization explains, however, that Burke has spent considerable time practicing the art of hypnosis in preparation to embark on the elaborate Balfour investigation, which would bar any notion of travel to India. Is the identity of “Colonel Yates” a lingering ghost from a previous screenplay draft?

Strangely, the CelluloidShockers.com version is the only restoration which alludes to the deceased Harry Balfour character. Investigating Smithson’s cries, Burke remarks that the blood-smeared wounds are the “same marks found on the neck of young Lucille’s deceased brother Harry Balfour”; nevertheless, it is the only reference to Harry. It seems this “reconstruction” attempts a happy medium between the original shooting script and the cutting continuity, integrating several written lines of dialogue and minor nuances. For instance, the surviving script explicitly states that the Stranger/Roger Balfour character bears a visible bullet wound, yet this detail is missing from every other modern reconstruction. Though static, the images are arranged quite coherently, allowing the narrative to avoid arbitrary complication.



*As in DRACULA, LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT posits its vampire in a ruined estate near the main seat of action. Here, a real estate broker pales as the Man in the Beaver Hat agrees to accept the decrepit property as-is.*

But there are major problems. The photo quality on the CelluloidShockers.com site is very crude, with the stills giving the appearance of being video captures, through minimal color burst and pause lines. And the pace of experiencing it, dependent on one’s particular internet server, is marred by the constant need of clicking to another page. Riley’s work at least can be more quickly surveyed, and with better picture quality.

Another problem is that CelluloidShockers.com occupies what is, for some of us, that most intangible of media: cyberspace. Perhaps that is, to a greater or lesser degree, a comment that could be made about **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT** itself: what could be more abstract than a lost film paraphrased in an ethereal medium?

After all, what *is* it we’re seeing, whether in Coolidge-Rask’s 1928 novelization, Riley’s





*Chaney's remarkable makeup, impossible to see in action today (and possibly, ever again): the first vampire makeup to utilize sharp fangs... and the last until 1957's **HORROR OF DRACULA**.*

1985 book, Schmidlin's 2002 film, or CelluloidShockers. com 2002 cyber version? Whatever it is, it's certainly not Tod Browning's film **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT**—an obvious comment, perhaps, but one with greater meaning than might at first be apparent. Beyond the fact that none of these "reconstructions" are films, none offer a single moving image from the motion picture itself. These merely offer publicity stills, and publicity stills alone. Not even one frame blow-up from a **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT** print appears in any of these. The four reconstructions are approximations constructed out of 1927 still photographs—which are themselves approximations, paraphrases, poses of scenes once found in the film itself.

And motion is a key ingredient of any motion picture. In 1991, Gary Rhodes interviewed one

witness of **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT**, a woman named Margaret Brannan, who saw the film on Christmas Day in 1927 in Oklahoma. It frightened her tremendously and she remembered it clearly decades later. What did she remember about the film most of all? That Chaney rolled his eyes repeatedly in a circular motion, for effect, while cloaked as the vampire. This is briefly mentioned in a few period reviews, including one from *THE NEW YORK TIMES*, but so briefly it's been scarcely mentioned in modern essays and books. Forrest J Ackerman has also noted that Chaney's vampire had a distinctive, squatting walk that was later parodied by the onscreen walk of Groucho Marx. Still photographs, as much as they spotlight Chaney's makeup, can't recapture such effects, and this fact only goes to show how much of **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT** still eludes us.

So what can we really hope to know about **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT**? At this point, we certainly know more about the desire to see it than we know about the film itself. And we certainly can applaud the efforts of all the "reconstructions," even

if the word itself seems inappropriate to modern versions created by people who have never seen the original film. More than anyone, we can applaud Rick Schmidlin for convincing a major cable channel to fund and broadcast such an essentially non-commercial silent film project. With available resources, Schmidlin tried valiantly to make the impossible possible.

But, in conclusion, our desire remains unquenched. **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT** is still missing—at least for the foreseeable future. So, along with waiting and hoping perhaps irrationally for news of a rediscovery, what can we do, beyond re-examining these "reconstructions"?

We can, of course, screen the one "reconstruction" that has hardly been mentioned in this article, the only reconstruction in which **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT**'s director participated. We can enjoy, despite its foibles and its reality-based conclusion, Tod Browning's **MARK OF THE VAMPIRE**. In the end, as an actual "movie," it may well be our most concrete link to the lost world and nebulous memory of **LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT**.





# DOUBLE DOG DARE

## SOCIETY

**Reader reaction** to our "Two Versions, Two Critics" look at Jacques Tourneur's **NIGHT OF THE DEMON** [US: **CURSE OF THE DEMON**, 1957] in VW #93 was very positive, so we've decided to try it again. The following pair of reviews inaugurate "Double Dog Dare," a new, occasional department in which two critics will voice opposing opinions about a single film. Richard Harland Smith and Kim Newman seem to differ on Brian Yuzna's **SOCIETY**, so let's see what they have to say... —TL

### SOCIETY

1989, Anchor Bay Entertainment,  
DD-2.0/MA/16:9/LB/CC/+,  
\$19.98, 98m 51s, DVD-1

*A paranoid satire of the class system, an effects-heavy study of homosexual panic, or both? Billy Warlock takes a licking in Brian Yuzna's SOCIETY.*



❖ **Richard Harland Smith** ❖

**B**rian Yuzna, filmmaker and frontman for the Barcelona-based Fantastic Factory (**FAUST**, **DAGON**) has directed nearly a dozen horror films since 1989 but remains best known for putting up the money for Stuart Gordon's over-the-top H.P. Lovecraft adaptation **RE-ANIMATOR** (1985). **RE-ANIMATOR**'s gore-for-broke approach married visceral body horror to slapstick comedy, sand-bagging moviegoers dulled by the '80s fashion for franchise horror *à la* by-the-numbers sequels to **HALLOWEEN**, **FRIDAY THE 13<sup>TH</sup>** and **A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET**. After producing **FROM BEYOND** (1986) and **DOLLS** (1987) for Gordon, Yuzna tried his hand at directing with **SOCIETY**, an ooey-goey admixture of **INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS**, **ROSEMARY'S BABY** and **THE STEPFORD WIVES**, set within the chilly *milieu* of Beverly Hills. When affluent but alienated teen Bill Whitney (Billy Warlock) listens to an illicit tape recording made during his sister Jenny's "coming out" party, he begins to suspect the existence

of a high society sex ring enacted between the local bluebloods and their budding progeny. The truth turns out to be much worse, as Bill follows a trail of discovery and horror that brings home the age-old adage "It all comes down to breeding."

Made at the tail end of the conservative, acquisitive Reagan-Bush years, **SOCIETY** bristles with veiled Republican-bashing and digs at the rich "sucking off" the poor (making it interesting that deviant carnality would become a signifier of the Democratic Clinton administration). For all its hatred of the swells and its concern for the plight of the *hoi polloi*, Woody Keith's quasi-autobiographical screenplay (written with Rick Fry and tweaked by Yuzna) makes less of a statement about those themes than did **CADDYSHACK** a decade earlier; **SOCIETY** even looks more dated, due to the ubiquity of mullets, pastel fashion tops and acid-washed denim. As with the boy hero of David Lynch's superior "something terrible underneath" exploration

*David Wiley prepares a frightened Blanchard (Tim Bartell) for the thrill of the shunt.*







*Billy discovers, to his horror, that Beverly Hills bad girl Clarisa (Devin DeVasquez) bends both ways.*

**BLUE VELVET** (made three years before **SOCIETY** and still looking relatively timeless), Bill Whitney's descent into the maelstrom seems sparked by sexual confusion bordering on full-out homosexual panic. Introduced sporting a muscle tee and grasping a phallic knife, the hardbodied Bill is increasingly repulsed by and suspicious of the female anatomy, and joins in physically abusive relationships with his male friends; while best friend Milo (**MUTE WITNESS'** Evan Richards) reacts with undisguised jealousy to Bill's infatuation with the silky Clarissa (Devin DeVasquez), it is Tim Bartell's doughy Blanchard (first seen hiding in a closet, no less) who hips Bill to his essential *otherness* in a clandestine encounter set beneath a beach boardwalk. (Bill's humiliation in the sand by a smirking Clarissa recalls the surfside flashback key to the mystery of Dario Argento's **TENEBRAE**— another film about the murderous fallout of sexual repression.) None of this subtext was likely intended by Yuzna, but there it is, plain as day.

For many horror fans and aficionados of the gruesome, the appeal of this remastered "European version" of **SOCIETY** is the reinstitution of 4m 4s of footage clipped at the time of the film's belated 1992 release (the source also of Republic Home Video's VHS tape, reviewed VW 13:14). Although most of this material is of marginal interest, a few frames of arguably offensive footage removed

from the film's climactic "shunting" scene are back where they belong, focusing on the "fisting" of Blanchard by the cult's *paterfamilias* (**FRIDAY THE 13TH PART 3's** David Wiley) and Bill's eye-popping revenge on the venal Ferguson (Ben Meyerson). Viewed in context (and post-**DEAD ALIVE**), it's hard to see what all the fuss was about; as intended by Yuzna, the scene is played more for laughs than for shudders and the effects work of Screaming Mad George does not lend itself to verisimilitude. Although the old Republic tape was not ill-served by its 1.33:1 framing, Anchor Bay has correctly letterboxed **SOCIETY** at 1.85:1. As with low budget features of that time, the anamorphic image is somewhat gauzy and slightly grainy, but overall clean and bright. The Dolby 2.0 Ultra Stereo sound is fine, and also noise-free. The disc has been given 26 chapters and a 2m 7s letterboxed trailer is included as a bonus alongside a feature-length audio commentary by Brian Yuzna. A plain-spoken, folksy yet bland narrator, Yuzna discusses **SOCIETY's** production history and disseminates trivia while watching his first film after the distance of many years. Yuzna cites his inspirations in films such as **THE SPIRAL STAIRCASE** and **ROSEMARY'S BABY** and laughs off the gelatinous excesses of the film's controversial climax: "It's hard to say what it means, but it sure looks right!"



**"Let me tell you** about the very rich," F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote. "They are different from you and me." Brian Yuzna's directorial debut, from a mutated script by Woody Keith and Rick Fry, takes Fitzgerald's thesis literally. As noted in the commentary track, **SOCIETY** was a marginal release in its country of origin but well-received in territories like Japan and Great Britain with more of a tradition of acknowledging and resenting class distinctions. It seemed in 1989 as remarkable a debut as Stuart Gordon's **RE-ANIMATOR** (which Yuzna produced), though Yuzna's inconsistent subsequent efforts—from his doubly disappointing second feature **BRIDE OF RE-ANIMATOR** through odd sequels (**RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD PART III**, two installments of **SILENT NIGHT, DEADLY NIGHT**), TV assignments (**TARZAN: THE EPIC ADVENTURES**) and DTV efforts (**THE DENTIST**, **PROGENY**) to the Spanish-shot comic book horror superhero dud **FAUST**—have somewhat eclipsed his initial achievement. Elements in later Yuzna projects, notably the blackly humorous Corbin Bernsen performance in the **DENTIST** films and the body-piercing zombie antics of his **LIVING DEAD** entry, pick up the virtues of **SOCIETY**, but he has yet to direct another film quite as unusual, challenging or satisfying.

Set in a pastel snake-pit vision of Beverly Hills, the film follows Billy Whitney (Bill Warlock), who apparently has it all: wealthy parents (Charles Lucia, Connie Danese), a sweet sister (Patrice Jennings), a luxurious mansion home, athletic success and high school popularity, a cheerleader girlfriend (Heidi Kozak) and a big black jeep. However, Bill is tormented by paranoid imaginings that he pours out to his too-genial shrink (Ben Slack). Convinced that he is adopted, he starts to wonder if his family and their wealthy circle ("society") are even the same species as him. Everything begins to fall apart when his sister's resentful ex-boyfriend plays him a tape of what really happened at her coming-out party ("First you'll copulate with your father and me, then with other people," coos Mrs. Whitney). Attracted to the school bad girl Clarisa (Devin DeVasquez), Bill finds that she bends the wrong way, and a series of pranks played against him escalate into a spin on the old disappearing corpse gag. Eventually, the appalling truth is revealed and he finds himself adrift in a sea of mutating, melting flesh as the rulers of society indulge in a predatory slime orgy that reveals how far from human they truly are, fully justifying the credit "Surrealistic Make-up Effects by Screaming Mad George."

*Bill Whitney's (Billy Warlock) especially tense relationship with Ferguson (Ben Myerson) eventually leads to fisticuffs.*







*Bill meets his butthead dad (Charles Lucia)  
in one of the many Freddy-esque visual spfx puns in SOCIETY.*

One of a trickle of late '80s films (**THE STEP-FATHER**, **PARENTS**, **VAMPIRE'S KISS**, **HEATHERS**, **THEY LIVE**) set against the political and social mores of the times, **SOCIETY** has now become a period piece, an interesting support feature for **AMERICAN PSYCHO** or **DONNIE DARKO**. Sign-of-the-time features like Warlock's Prince-look feather-perm and the PENTHOUSE Pet sleekness of DeVasquez's transgressive heroine anchor it in its era even as its underlying themes remain inescapably relevant. Authority figures obsessively lecture Billy on his obligations to "society" while his shrewish steady nags him towards toadying to the junior versions of the judges and doctors who turn out to be literally a breed apart. Hard to classify even within the broad church of the horror film, it's a rare "effects" picture that runs for an hour on unnerving glimpses (a suppurating rubbery patch on the sister's back, Vasquez's hand reaching where it couldn't possibly stretch) and clues (the twisted bodies seen in artworks around the Whitney home or a sex-doll with a naked GI Joe shoved in its mouth) before delivering the goods in a still-amazing, over-the-top finale that owes at least as much to Jan Svankmajer (especially **DIMENSIONS OF DIALOGUE**) as the "Nightmare on Elm Street" series (invoked when Lucia's face sticks out between his buttocks and he muses "Gee, son, perhaps I *am* a butthead!"). The rubber monsterwork is not just sensationally gruesome and weirdly sexual: the on-the-nose dialogue ("The rich have always sucked off low-class shit

like you") and viciously ironic use of the "Eton Boating Song" on the soundtrack always jab at satiric points. It may be that the "shunting" sequence goes so far that the film has nowhere to go afterwards, but its flurry of pointless escape is nevertheless as bleakly downbeat as the finish of any body snatcher movie.

Anchor Bay's DVD is letterboxed at 1.85:1 (enhanced for 16:9), with 26 chapter stops and has a Dolby Digital Ultra Stereo track. It's a nice transfer of a film with an unusual look (two-parts deliberate TV movie bland to one-part Boschian inferno) and reproduces well the pastels and pinks vibrant in the theaters. The box boasts that this is "the UNRATED VERSION of the depraved shocker," including all the material snipped to appease the MPAA; this is identical to the version released in most overseas territories, including the UK. Besides a leaflet insert memoir of a set visit written by Chas. Balun in his imitable style ("I look like a wasted, 250 lb. greasy hairball coughed up by some God-knows-what") and the suggestive trailer, the only extra is a commentary track by Yuzna that's a model of the form. He reveals that the original script had a more conventional blood sacrifice cult as villains and that he worked out a mythology involving virus-mutated cavemen and parallel evolution to justify the premise, gives a solid history of the making and distribution of the film, points out features of interest (the high school location was Warlock's genuine *alma mater*) and meticulously gives credit to all the creatives. 🐾



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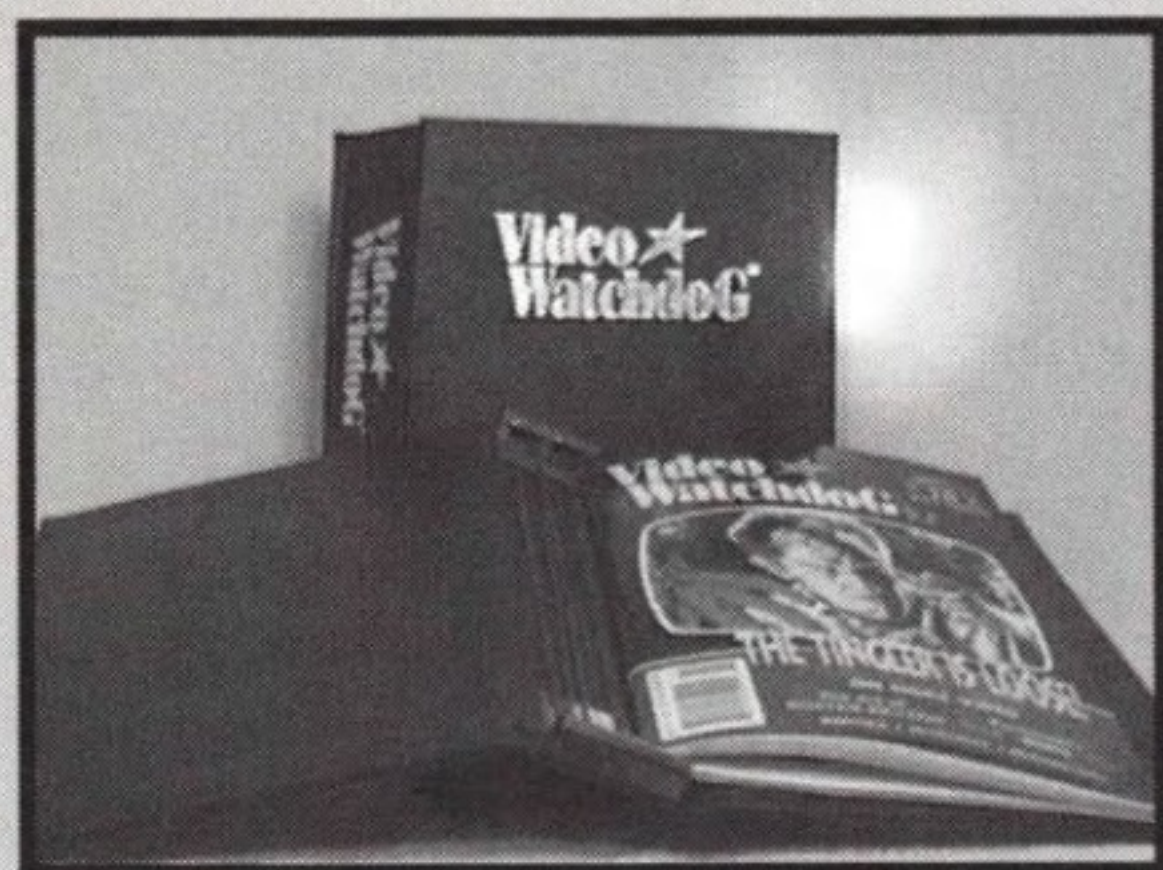
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# The Lord of the Rings



*Reviewed by Rebecca & Sam Umland*

**I**t has been estimated that J.R.R. Tolkien's epic novel *THE LORD OF THE RINGS* is second only to the Bible in terms of its numbers of readers, worldwide. We are calling it an epic novel because *THE LORD OF THE RINGS* is not a trilogy, although it is commonly perceived this way. It is in fact one long novel consisting of six books and appendices, published serially in England in three volumes during the years 1954-55. New Line Cinema's release of Peter Jackson's adaptation of the novel in serial installments over the past two years—the final installment to appear later this year—only reiterates the false impression that *THE LORD OF THE RINGS* was designed as a trilogy. In reality, New Line's release pattern is duplicating the way the novel was first published in three parts almost 50 years ago.

After Tolkien's death in 1973 and the subsequent publication of his posthumous *THE SILMARILLION* (1977), interest in his work was revived by a new generation of readers. Consequently, the late '70s saw three films—all animated—based on Tolkien's books, although they tended to foster the impression that

Tolkien's work was suitable primarily for children and adolescents. Perhaps the most ambitious of the late '70s Tolkien adaptations was Ralph Bakshi's assemblage of live action and animation, **THE LORD OF THE RINGS** (1978), which, though technically impressive, did poorly at the box-office, scuttling any plans for an expected (and necessary) sequel. Bakshi's version—not the complete novel, but approximately the first half of Tolkien's epic novel—was preceded,

**THE LORD OF THE RINGS:  
THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING:  
SPECIAL EXTENDED DVD  
EDITION**

2001, New Line Home Entertainment,  
DD-5.1/DTS/MA/16:9/LB/ST/CC/+,  
\$39.98, 227m 51s, DVD-1

*Frodo Baggins (Elijah Wood) reaches out for the ultimate prize in THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING.*



in 1977, by a Rankin & Bass production made for children, **THE HOBBIT**, based on Tolkien's first published novel, which was also his first attempt to depict the world of Middle Earth. **THE HOBBIT** was followed by another Rankin & Bass animated production a few years later, **THE RETURN OF THE KING** (1980), a piffle also made for children. Both Rankin & Bass productions depicted Hobbits as something on the order of Smurfs—pixies with an attitude—whose stories consisted of banal everyday misadventures, and whose primary villain was merely an ineffectual caricature of Evil. The less-than-stellar performance of films explicitly derived from Tolkien's work tended to discourage other projects from being undertaken in the years immediately following.

Given the failure of these initial attempts to bring Tolkien to the screen, it is no wonder that filmmakers were reticent to try again. Fortunately, New Zealand-based filmmaker Peter Jackson (**HEAVENLY CREATURES, THE FRIGHTENERS**) had the audacity—and vision—to try. His adaptation of Tolkien's masterpiece has restored both dignity and gravity to Tolkien's themes, dispelling any lingering notions that Tolkien was just a grandfatherly old eccentric, spinning out benign juvenile fantasies a cut above the rest. It's true that, as an author, Tolkien had an immense influence on fantasy (and science fiction), but his ambition with **THE LORD OF THE RINGS** was to

create nothing short of a personal mythology, the creation of a cosmology comparable to John Milton's **PARADISE LOST**—the latter an epic poem whose power and influence has been so vast that readers have since confused episodes of Milton's imaginative poem with those of his source text, **THE HOLY BIBLE**! Of course, Milton was an English Protestant and Tolkien a Roman Catholic, but their visions equally partake of the Romantic desire to create coherent and intelligible worlds of their own invention, and they share a common precursor, Dante Alighieri, with his unapproachable **DIVINE COMEDY**.

Of course, Jackson encountered all of the difficulties that come with a screen adaptation of such a formidable and dense literary work. Fortunately, he understood the need to impose a logic suitable to the film medium, rather than following what would have been a fatal course, that of a slavish transposition from book to screen. Doubtless, Tolkien aficionados have found fault with his omissions and alterations. Although Jackson's **THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING** is a remarkable and compelling achievement, we hesitate to call it "definitive"—not because it omits or alters the source material, however. Smart, entertaining, spectacular, **THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING** is nonetheless a *dark* interpretation of Tolkien, perhaps not surprising given that Jackson began his career making horror films.

*Frodo against the glorious backdrop of Rivendell, an example of the magnificent, digitally enhanced matte painting on display in Peter Jackson's film.*





Tolkien's narrative strategy in **THE LORD OF THE RINGS** was to alternate scenes of joy with scenes of terror. Jackson's **FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING** is more terror than joy, although the "Special Extended Edition," which adds 29m 49s to the narrative component of the original theatrical version (the latter available on New Line's two-disc DVD issue, #N5542, 178m 10s), tends to balance the terror with a little more joy—not much, but a little—suggesting that he and co-writers Fran Walsh and Philippa Boyens were well aware of Tolkien's preferred narrative pattern, the interweaving of dark and light. They also reveal an awareness of Tolkien's indebtedness to the dramatic lessons of Shakespeare's *MACBETH*, in whose paranoid world friend and enemy are often indistinguishable, suggested by the Witches' famous line, "Fair is foul, and foul is fair." Tolkien converted the Witches' line into a dramatic principle: the Ring is beautifully crafted but corrupting; Strider (Aragorn, played by Viggo Mortensen) is initially perceived as a threat but, in reality, he is an ally; Boromir (Sean Bean) proclaims he is an ally but secretly desires to take the Ring; the white cloak of Saruman (Christopher Lee) suggests benevolence, but he is really an enemy, and so on.

While retaining some features of the novel's paranoid scheme, the film adaptation removes all elements not related to the central quest, the journey of Frodo Baggins (Elijah Wood, a former child actor whose guileless innocence and large, winsome eyes make him perfect for the part) to Mount Doom to destroy the One Ring. For instance, the episode of the Hobbits at the house of Tom Bombadil—an engaging character with whom Tolkien was clearly intrigued, as evidenced by his other writings—is removed, the writers instead opting to have Frodo and his entourage arrive directly at Bree. Moreover, the film opens with an extrapolated episode, a "Prologue" (which, in his audio commentary, Jackson says was forced on him by the studio), consisting of a huge battle scene during which Sauron the Great, the Dark Lord, loses control of the Master-Ring, the "One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them." Sauron's loss of the One Ring is given a literal transposition to the screen, when the Ring is literally cut from Sauron's hand by Isildur (Harry Sinclair) with his broken sword. The power promised by the Ring overcomes Isildur's better judgment, and he is compelled to keep the Ring and use it for his own gain. Inevitably, he is killed

*Ian McKellen adds another classic performance to his resume with Gandalf, the good wizard who shepherds the Fellowship through unimaginable dangers.*







*Likewise for Christopher Lee, whose performance as the evil Saruman fulfills a lifelong dream for the actor.*

because he possesses it (which is why Boromir later on refers to the Ring as “Isildur’s Bane”). Subsequently, the Ring is lost—or at least forgotten—until Bilbo Baggins (Ian Holm) obtains the Ring from Gollum (Andy Serkis, whose CGI character has a much larger role in **THE TWO TOWERS**). The story then moves to the Shire, where Frodo greets Gandalf the Gray (Ian McKellen, in a typically fine performance) on his visit to Hobbiton.

The scenes set in Hobbiton are the film’s most joyful moments: pastoral and humorous, they are a fully realized depiction of the simple pleasures of Hobbit life. In this rustic locale we are introduced to the Hobbits who will eventually accompany Frodo on his mission to destroy the Ring: Frodo’s gardener Samwise Gamgee, called Sam (Sean Astin, very good in the role), as well as Peregrin Took (“Pippin” or “Pip,” played by Billy Boyd) and “Merry” Brandybuck (Dominic Monaghan). Unwittingly, Frodo acquires the Ring from his uncle, Bilbo, but it is Gandalf who realizes that it is the One Ring created by Sauron. Unless the One Ring is destroyed, Gandalf warns, the world will fall under the control of Sauron, whose power was *not* destroyed—but only weakened—when he lost control of the Ring. This

creates a disjunction that is confusing for some of the film’s viewers, because Sauron crumbles to ashes after the Ring is cut from his hand, suggesting that in fact he has been effectively vanquished—not so. The confusion is perhaps due to the sequence having been influenced by a similar opening sequence in Francis Ford Coppola’s **BRAM STOKER’S DRACULA** (1992).

Frodo and company set off for the elfen city of Rivendell, where they plan to rendezvous with Gandalf. The story takes a somber turn when the Nine, the Black Riders—the Nazgûl, the Ringwraiths, the servants of Sauron—appear, seeking to take back the One Ring that has been entrusted to Frodo’s care. Fortunately, at the walled city of Bree, Frodo and the Halflings meet a warrior named Strider—who is, in fact, Aragorn, heir of Gondor. (Viggo Mortensen, who plays this role, was a late replacement who came on board just prior to the beginning of shooting, and is among fans perhaps the most hotly contested member of Jackson’s cast.) At Weathertop, Frodo is seriously wounded by one of the Ringwraiths, but is saved by the elf Arwen (Liv Tyler) and transported by her to Rivendell. Meanwhile, Gandalf has traveled to Isengard, where he seeks the council of





*Liv Tyler as the elf Arwen, the love interest of Aragorn, who has a much larger role in the series' second film, **THE TWO TOWERS**.*

Saruman, his fellow wizard. Gandalf learns that Saruman desires to retrieve the Ring for himself, and is creating a vast army of dybbuks, or Orcs (monsters) to do his bidding. When Gandalf refuses to join forces with him, Saruman imprisons Gandalf on the pinnacle of Orthanc. Soon, Gandalf engineers a dramatic escape and reunites with Frodo and the Halflings in Rivendell.

Following the Council of Elrond (Hugo Weaving), the Fellowship of the Ring is formed—those who will transport the Ring to Mount Doom, in the depths of Mordor, a volcano in whose fires it can be destroyed. The Fellowship is composed of nine unlikely individuals: Frodo, Sam, Pip and Merry, Gandalf, Aragorn, the warrior Boromir (Denethor's son, whose brother Faramir has an important role in **THE TWO TOWERS**), the dwarf Gimli (John Rhys-Davies) and the elfin archer Legolas (Orlando Bloom, a fan favorite). Not only must the Fellowship face the many dangers on the journey to Mordor, they must also face the additional threat posed by Saruman and his army of darkness.

"If I take one more step," says Sam to Frodo soon after they depart on their journey, "it'll be the farthest away from home I've ever been." His

line encapsulates both the audacity of Tolkien's story, as well as the appeal it has had for generations of readers: in the classic epic style of the medieval texts Tolkien taught, the fate of an entire world is placed in the hands of unlikely heroes—in this case, two little Hobbits inching their way toward Mount Doom, neither of whom have been farther from the Shire than the farthest edge of one of its surrounding fields. Still, Hobbits in general have traits that make them especially good at completing tasks, and we are certainly not the first to observe that Hobbits make interesting and appealing heroes. Tolkien makes the observation that, even if one would spend a year among Hobbits and come to know them well, they would inevitably do something both surprising and unexpected. In this sense, perhaps they are our better selves.

Yet, despite the fact that **THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING** concludes with the image of Frodo and Sam (as does **THE TWO TOWERS**, the image of the two of them as diminutive figures dwarfed by the surrounding landscape clearly being a structuring principle to mark the end of each episode), one of the weaknesses of Jackson's film is that the Hobbits' central role is often marginalized for



the sake of spectacle; sometimes one loses sight of the fact that it is Frodo who must destroy the Ring—not Gandalf, not Aragorn, not Sam, but Frodo alone. Of course, he has help—that is the purpose of the Fellowship—but it is his stubborn resilience that is the essential drama. For instance, the passage through Moria, climaxing with Gandalf's heroic stance against the Balrog at the Bridge of Khazad-dûm, is in the film a sequence filled with spectacular digital effects. Tolkien, in contrast, often wrote trying to emulate the great restraint and understatement that so characterized the Anglo-Saxon heroic literature he loved and spent his life studying. Tolkien wrote simply of Gandalf's demise, "Fly, you fools!" he cried, and was gone." What is litotes in Tolkien is often spectacle in the film—the long, agonized slow-motion death of Boromir at the hands of the Orcs is another such instance of the film's sometimes florid, histrionic style clashing with Tolkien's stylistic restraint.

Still, **THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING** is great pop cinema; its purpose is entertainment, which is what Tolkien averred was his goal with his novel. New Line's Extended DVD Edition consists of four discs secured within a portfolio that fits like a book in a heavy slipcase (the analogy of course being to slipcased limited editions of books). New Line has also issued the Extended Edition as a "Collector's Gift Set" which includes a fifth disc packaged alongside, consisting of an excellent National Geographic special about Tolkien's life and works. (The Collector's Gift Set is easily identified because it is packaged with a pair of Argonath bookends, at \$79.98 list.) The Extended DVD Edition of **THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING** spreads the film out over two discs in two parts. Part One, appropriately, ends at the 105m 29s point, following the formation of the Fellowship. Part Two, on the second disc, runs 122m 22s. The Extended Edition is thus 49m 41s longer than the theatrical cut, but 19m 52s of this additional time consists of a segment appended to the credit scroll listing all the members of The Lord of the Rings Fan Club! The remaining 29m 49s consists of 21 extended scenes and the inclusion of five scenes, totaling 7m 9s, that were omitted from the theatrical cut.

Thankfully, New Line took the extra effort and has marked the extended and added scenes with asterisks on the scene selection menus, saving us, at least, a great deal of trouble. Surprisingly, only one of the five additional scenes shows more of Hobbit life (1m 25s), although three sequences set in Hobbiton have been lengthened by roughly

3m. There is an additional light-hearted scene showing Frodo and Sam roughing it soon after they've begun their journey (1m 39s); but the remaining three added scenes essentially serve to expand the character of Aragorn. One of these is rather important, as it shows him at the tomb of his mother, Gilraen (it's not entirely clear in the theatrical cut that Aragorn was raised in Rivendell by the elves, which is why his mother is buried there), and another serves to introduce his love for the (immortal) elf Arwen, a romance that figures prominently in **THE TWO TOWERS**. Unfortunately, none of the additional footage helps clarify what is perhaps the film's most confused sequence, the scenes set in Lothlórien consisting of Frodo's encounter with Galadriel, Queen of the elves (Cate Blanchett, who—for no clear reason—also provides the voice of the narrator in the Prologue). In Tolkien's novel, Frodo first sees the searching Eye of Sauron while gazing into the Mirror of Galadriel; in the film version, however, the Eye (of Sauron) is introduced when Frodo first puts on the Ring. (Although it would seem to be at odds with his love of ancient texts and languages, Tolkien often displayed a powerful visual imagination.) In Tolkien's mythology, Galadriel is an important figure, her past exploits comprising a long section of **THE SILMARILLION**. Certainly the film cannot afford to delve into much of Galadriel's background, but frankly, her role in the story is entirely unclear in both the theatrical and extended cuts. She is shown, however, to be attracted to the power of the Ring, as Frodo sees her face change from beautiful to horrifying—what's "fair is foul"—suggesting that the Ring inevitably corrupts all those who wear it. Thus the Ring, which can only be worn by Sauron, is misunderstood by all others as a *passe-partout*, or magic "pass key" to the acquisition of ultimate Power.

While New Line's original, two-disc issue of the theatrical cut contains no audio commentary, there are no fewer than *four* separate audio commentaries viewers can choose from while watching the extended cut. One of the commentaries is provided by Jackson and co-writers Fran Walsh and Philippa Boyens, with Jackson providing most of the commentary. A second commentary consists of eight members of the conceptual design crew, among them two key talents who Jackson sought out, Alan Lee and John Howe. The third commentary contains the insights of the production and post/production crew, and the fourth assembles ten members of the cast, with Ian McKellen acting as host to the actors who played the parts of members of the Fellowship, joined by



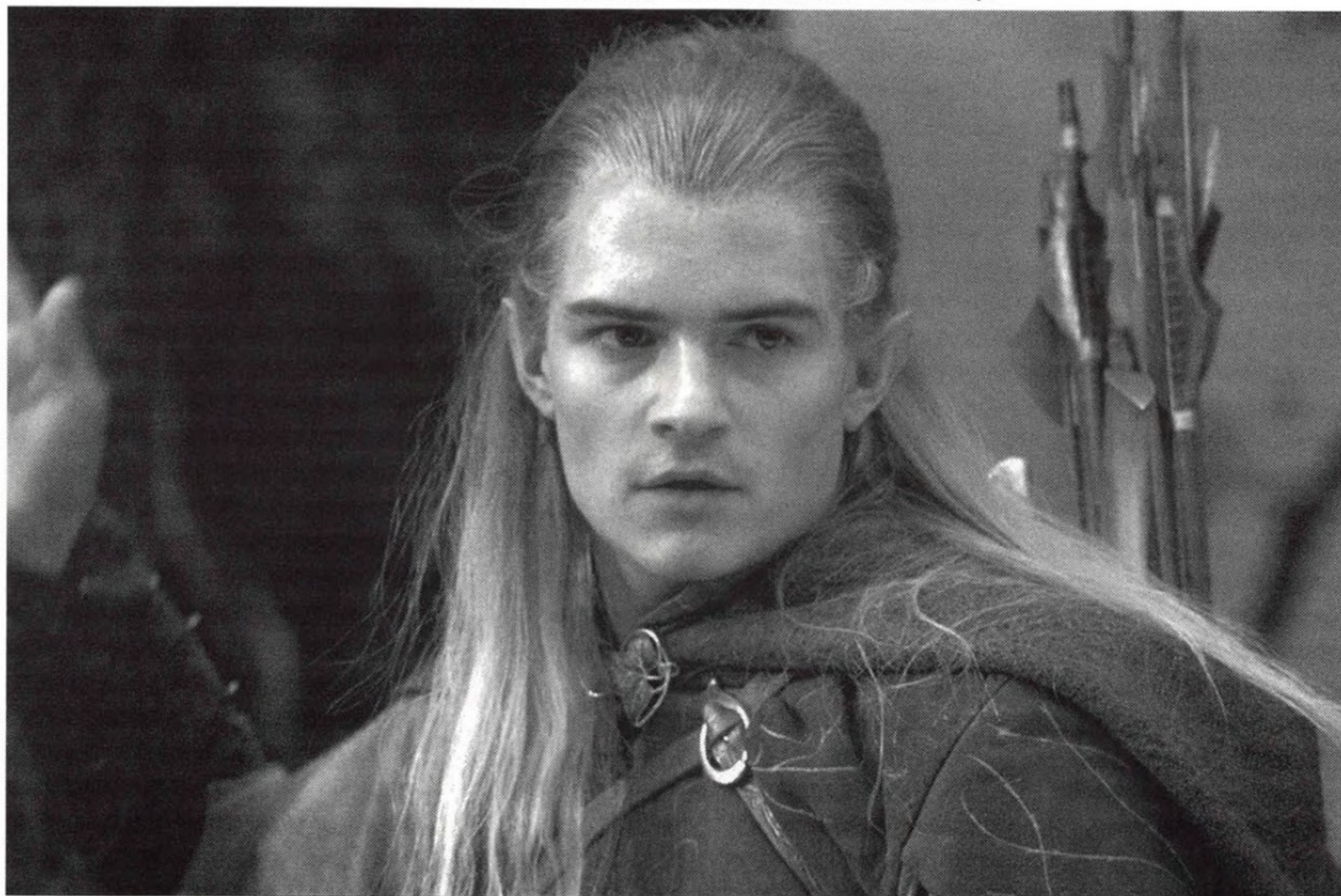
Christopher Lee. Given the number of participants on each commentary, it would be impossible to keep them all straight, but fortunately the name of each speaker is superimposed in the black bar on the top of the screen as each takes his or her turn—a practice other DVD manufacturers would do well to emulate.

The Jackson commentary is, of course, essential listening, but we found the cast commentary to be quite engaging as well, particularly the remarks made by Ian McKellen and Christopher Lee. We paid particular attention to Lee's comments given his oft-stated admiration for the works of Tolkien. In contrast to Peter Jackson, who said that he was not compelled to read **THE LORD OF THE RINGS** until 1978, after having seen Ralph Bakshi's version (to which, says Jackson, he paid one visual homage in his version), Lee claims he has been reading and re-reading the novel since its publication in 1954-55, and frequently corresponded with Tolkien until Tolkien's death. Although given to hyperbole, we suspect that Lee is probably telling the truth when he says that a life-long ambition of his was to play Gandalf, although he admits to being delighted playing a part in a film version of Tolkien's book in any capacity. He

is not reticent to point out what he feels are some omissions in the script concerning Saruman's character, one of them a motivational question we also found had remained explained, which is why, or when, Saruman decided to seek the One Ring for himself—by no means a trivial issue.

The four audio commentaries are the proverbial tip of the iceberg, because virtually every facet of the production is explored on the remaining two discs, containing roughly *seven hours* of material. Called Appendices (by analogy to a book), they are split into two parts. Part One, "From Book to Vision," includes a 1m 17s introduction by Peter Jackson and discusses the evolution of the project from initial discussions with New Line, the development of the script, the hiring of the artists and designers, to storyboarding and the shooting of test footage. Part Two, "From Vision to Reality" contains a 27s introduction by Elijah Wood, and documents the actual shooting of the film, up through its World Premiere. We are hard-pressed to imagine any aspect of the production that remains unexplored in the Appendices; if nothing else, they allow one to understand not only the sheer ambition of the project, but its scope and complexity.

*Orlando Bloom as the elfin archer Legolas Greenleaf, one of the most valuable warriors in the Fellowship.*






Pre-production, for instance, began years before the actual 15-month shooting period. Richard Taylor's WETA Workshop, which produced all of the film's armor, weapons, creatures, and miniatures, created over 45,000 separate items; costume designer Ngila Dickson oversaw the design and making of 19,000 costumes by forty seamstresses; there were 300 people employed in the art department alone. While most major productions have a Second Unit, **THE LORD OF THE RINGS** had a *second* Second Unit. The film may have had a cast of thousands, but it also had a crew of thousands. The supplements also reveal Jackson's reliance on a number of new technologies, one of them being a software that creates "animatics." Before shooting one foot of film, Jackson created the entire film not simply on storyboards, but subsequently by using "animatic" digital software whereby he could not only animate characters and sets, but also simulate effects, so that he then knew all the camera angles he wanted, but also camera placement and movements: he clearly did his homework preparation. Portions of these "animatic" sequences are included in Part One of the Appendices, as well as hundreds of separate costume and weapons designs, character sketches, special effects demonstrations, art work, and set designs, including initial sketches, for each of the major locations. Nothing is left out: there is video footage, for instance, of the director and designers actually finding the location later used as Hobbiton. After finding the proper rustic setting, the Hobbit holes were built by carpenters, trees and shrubs were planted, grasses seeded, and gardens planted and maintained *a full year* before shooting actually commenced at the location—all of this done to make the set look as authentic as possible. Each of the major sets and locations are explored in detail, from the early conceptual designs to the actually building and painting (and if actual locations in New Zealand, the special effects performed on them): Bree, Weathertop, Trollshaw, Rivendell, Moria, the Bridge of Khazad-dûm, Lothlórien, the River Anduin, on and on. There are interviews with all of the major actors, technicians, artists and crew, the requisite behind-the-scenes footage—and even home video taken by some of the actors. An entire section is devoted to perhaps the most important prop, the Ring, and the craftsmen who forged it—"them" rather, as several different Rings were made, including one six inches in diameter used during a forced perspective shot.

We were unable to access the discs' DVD-ROM material on our Macintosh G3.

Then there is the fifth disc, which consists primarily of a very good 52m 40s National Geographic "Beyond the Movie" documentary that is part biography and part critical analysis of Tolkien's massive novel. In addition to the documentary, the disc—which carries the Warner Home Video logo—includes a 6m 54s clip on "The Inklings," Tolkien's literary group which also included C.S. Lewis and Charles Williams, and the 6m 53s "The Language & Landscape of Middle Earth," exploring the various sources and inspirations for Middle Earth. The longer "Beyond the Movie" documentary explores aspects of Tolkien's life, including his experiences as a soldier in the trenches during World War I, and how these found expression in his books (Middle Earth actually took hold in the author's imagination while recuperating from wounds suffered in battle). It also explores other interesting aspects of Tolkien's thought, including his interest in the Finnish language and a land called Viena Karelia located on the Finnish-Russian border, whose epic work, the *KALEVALA*, provided the model for the Elvish language used in **THE LORD OF THE RINGS**. There is also some speculation that the *KALEVALA*, which includes a tale of a forged object that is destroyed to secure peace, also provided Tolkien the inspiration for the myth of the One Ring. While the supplemental materials included on the Special Extended DVD Edition range from the trivial to the insightful, they all serve to enlarge one's appreciation both of the novel's depth and the film's ambition, and are therefore valuable both to the seasoned enthusiast and those who want to find out what the fuss is all about.

Originally filmed in Super 35, New Line's widescreen DVD issue is acceptably matted at 2.32:1 with 16:9 enhancement, although a standard (full-screen) transfer of the film is also available, which opens up the top and bottom of the frame considerably while substantially reducing information on each side. The picture is crisp and colors are acceptably saturated, with excellent contrasts and deep blacks. We prefer the DTS soundtrack because it has better defined directional effects and a more detailed subwoofer bottom, but the DD-5.1 is certainly fine. The disc is acceptably closed-captioned, and is subtitled in English, while audio tracks in languages other than English were apparently sacrificed for the sake of the numerous audio commentaries by the actors and crew. 



# DVDs



*Giuliano Gemma and Lee Van Cleef weigh the pros and cons of revenge in Tonio Valerii's Spaghetti Western DAY OF ANGER.*

## DAY OF ANGER

*I giorni dell'ira*  
aka **DAYS OF WRATH**

1968, Wild East Productions,  
DD-2.0/MA/ST/LB/+, \$24.95,  
111m 41s, DVD-0

## BOOT HILL

*La collina degli stivali*  
1969, Wild East Productions,  
DD-2.0/LB/+, \$24.95, 92m 2s, DVD-0  
By Richard Harland Smith

Produced at the height of the vogue for Spaghetti Westerns inaugurated by the international success of Sergio Leone's **A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS** (1964), these later offerings continue to dwell in Leone's long shadow. Tonio Valerii, assistant director on **FISTFUL**'s profitable sequel,

**FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE** (1965), struck out on his own with **A TASTE FOR KILLING** [*Per il Gusto di Uccidere*, 1966], an Italian-Spanish co-production starring Craig Hill. Valerii's next film reunited him with Lee Van Cleef, second-billed star of **FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE** and its follow-up, **THE GOOD THE BAD AND THE UGLY** (1966), in the tale of the war of wills between a revenge-minded gunslinger and his conscience-stricken protégé (Giuliano Gemma).

Although the Italo-German co-production **DAY OF ANGER** enjoys a sterling reputation among fans, it is difficult to contradict Christopher Frayling's assessment of it as ultimately "pedestrian." Despite a

committed performance by Van Cleef (who seems to be having more fun here than he did in his work for Leone) and a charismatic turn by Gemma (who rose to fame in Italy as "Montgomery Wood" in a pair of Westerns from Leone collaborator Duccio Tessari), the stars have no one to play against. Lukas Ammann, Giorgio Gargiullo and **KRIMINAL**'s Andrea Bosisio feel collectively second string as the objects of Van Cleef's vengeance and their climactic comeuppance lacks cathartic thrust. (Clint Eastwood got it right a few years later in the Gothic oater **HIGH PLAINS DRIFTER**, his first Western as star and director.) Worse yet, the story allows the most vile of the



corrupt town's "rich bastards" to walk away unscathed, which is at odds with the redemptive fadeout depicting a contrite Gemma throwing away his six-shooter as a renunciation of evil. Despite the inclusion of a couple of classic setpieces (including a horseback showdown using muzzle-loaders), Ernesto Gastaldi's screenplay takes its sweet time getting to the inevitable face-off between master and pupil, which seems necessitated more by genre requirements and time constraints than frontier psychology.

Taking some of the sting out of **DAY OF ANGER**'s derivative-ness is a first-rate score by Riz Ortolani (released on long-playing record both here and in Europe) and expert use of the widescreen format by cinematographer Enzo Serafin (who had shot **HERCULES VS. THE HYDRA** in CinemaScope for Carlo Ludovico Bragaglia during the heyday of the *peplum* and shared photographic duties on Giacomo Gentilomo's **THE LAST OF THE VIKINGS** with an uncredited Mario Bava). Tonio Valerii's use of Spanish locations put on the map six years earlier by Sergio Leone lend to the film an intriguing patina of shared history. (These Almerian backdrops had first been scouted, if not immortalized, by Spanish director Joaquín Romero Marchent, whose later **CUT-THROATS NINE** was as much an epitaph for the Spaghetti Western as the spate of Italian comedies that marked the sub-genre's demise.) If the principal villains feel a bit dry, one can look forward to brief but colorful appearances by such Leone alumni Ricardo Palacios, José "Pepe" Calvo, Al Mulock (the desperado who unwisely interrupts Eli Wallach's bubble bath in **THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY**) and stuntman Benito

Stefanelli—all of whom make the most of their limited screen time. Sergio Leone was a hands-on producer for Valerii's later **MY NAME IS NOBODY** [*Il mio nome è Nessuno*, 1973], whose script (again by Gastaldi) told a similar story of an aging gunfighter and his spirited apprentice but with expressly comic results.

Heavily cut and cropped to standard frame on the old Imperial VHS tape (titled **DAYS OF WRATH**), **DAY OF ANGER** has been restored to nearly its intended Techniscope ratio (2.25:1) for this special edition DVD. Constructed from more than one element, the presentation is not at all times optimal, with coarse grain throughout and one patently dupey patch towards the finish; on the plus side, colors are disarmingly vivid (especially the red roses that adorn Miss Vivian's bordello), black levels are satisfyingly deep (particularly the set-to at "the Old Mill") and instances of frame damage are few. The 2-channel sound is robust and clean, with a choice of English (the language the actors speak onscreen) or Italian soundtracks. (Although Gemma spoke English, his original voice is not used in the English dub.) Included as a supplement is an isolated music track, a real perk for fans of Ortolani's evocative score. The film's Italian credit sequence has been used for the film, with the American **DAY OF ANGER** title sequence (2m 50s) and the British **DAYS OF WRATH** (2m 25s) offered as alternates. (Curiously, Al Mulock's name has been dropped from the Italian and American credits, which explains why the actor's name is so often left off of the film's cast list.) Euro-western filmographies are provided for Van Cleef (who also rates a thumbnail bio) and Gemma, as is a

substantial gallery of lobby cards, *locandini*, pressbooks and stills for the film under its various titles.

Giuliano Gemma is the subject of "Gemma On Gemma" (17m 6s), a taped interview conducted by an unseen/unheard Antonio Bruschini (co-author of The Glittering Images books on Spaghetti Westerns) in which the actor reflects on his early days as an acrobat, speaks of his *bellissima rapporta* with Lee Van Cleef and relates a wry anecdote about playing a genuinely painful fight scene opposite Al Mulock (the Canadian actor fell or jumped to his death from a hotel window *in full cowboy regalia* during the filming of Sergio Leone's **ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST**). Finally, "Almeria Then and Now" (3m 7s) compares past and present shots of this famous location—a very *simpatico* supplement. The disc has been given a healthy 24 chapters and a four-page insert (with liner notes by Charles Ambler) proud in original poster art.

Terence Hill (aka Mario Girotti) and Bud Spencer (aka Carlo Pedersoli) found cinematic fame as the garrulous protagonists of Enzo Barboni's slapstick "Trinity and Bambino" series, beginning with **THEY CALL ME TRINITY** [*Lo Chiamavano Trinità*, 1971], which in Italy outgrossed Sergio Leone's **ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST**. The svelte Venetian and the ursine Neapolitan (a former fashion designer) were first teamed onscreen in Giuseppe Colizzi's **GOD FORGIVES—I DON'T** [*Dio perdona... io no!*, 1967], a more straightforward but not humorless Western co-starring Frank Wolff; its success led to two quasi-sequels, **ACE HIGH** [*I quattro dell'Ave*





Taking the traditional Western in new directions, *BOOT HILL* pairs *TRINITY* star Terence Hill with the great Woody Strode.

*Mariabi*, 1968] with Eli Wallach, and *BOOT HILL* [*La collina degli stivali*, 1969]. Widely considered to be the least of Colizzi's trilogy, *BOOT HILL* remains of interest for how it attempts to take the Spaghetti Western to a new level. Wounded by bushwhackers, Hill's "Cat Stevens" (a name that appears in most synopses of the film, but which is never spoken here) takes refuge with a traveling variety show run by bogus fortune teller Mimosa (Lionel Stander) and Thomas (Woody Strode), an acrobat. Passing through a mining town, the troupe is caught up in a war of attrition between a swindler (Victor Buono) and the Irish miners whose land concessions he covets. The murder of Thomas' high wire partner urges the former gunfighter to join forces with Cat and retired lawman Hutch (Spencer) to see justice prevail.

Influenced more by Federico Fellini than Sergio Leone, Giuseppe Colizzi uses *BOOT HILL* to tweak as many genre standards as he honors. The film

begins with a montage of grizzled prospectors rolling dice and slapping cards, backed by a jazzy bass line that evokes *THE HUSTLER* more readily than "The Man With No Name." Colizzi's use of circus paraphernalia adds a *Fellinesque* aspect to this otherwise conventional storyline, which climaxes in a pantomime enacted by the troupe to expose before the town and a visiting magistrate (Eduardo Ciannelli) the villainy of the claim jumpers. (Bordering on the surreal is the aerialists' eulogy for the murdered miners, whose names are called out from the high wire.) For all its novelty, *BOOT HILL* occasionally drops the ball in providing the minimum action requirement, cutting away at the last moment from Hill's *faccia a faccia* with *BLACK SABBATH*'s Glauco Onorato (as a hired gun who conducts himself with clerical solemnity) and by following a 10m street shootout with a slapstick barroom brawl (with composer Carlo Rustichelli doing his best Nino Rota impersonation). Colizzi directed no more Westerns after this, so it's likely

that his heart wasn't in the genre except to thwart its conventions; as he often did, Colizzi infuses the *macho* proceedings with a whiff of homoeroticism, never spelling out Thomas' relationship to his acrobatic partner and engendering curiosity about Hutch's deaf-mute partner "Baby Doll" (*ANTHROPHAGUS* star Luigi "Luca" Montefiore, aka "George Eastman"), to whom Cat is described somewhat vaguely as "someone from my past."

However, *BOOT HILL* suffers from its own shortcomings (Victor Buono is, *ahem*, largely wasted) or in relation to better-respected entries in the Spaghetti Western canon, Euro-Cult fans should enjoy the interaction of the leads with support players Alberto Dell'Acqua (*TEXAS, ADIOS*) and Nazzareno Zamperla (*A PISTOL FOR RINGO*) as members of the troupe; Dell'Acqua and Zamperla were both stuntmen who segued into acting assignments and had previously played brothers in *SEVEN GUNS FOR THE MACGREGORS* [*Sette pistole per i MacGregor*, 1965] and its sequel, *UP THE*



**MACGREGORS** [*Sette donne per i Macgregor*, 1966], both directed by Franco Giraldi, Sergio Leone's AD on **A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS**. The scene in which Thomas coaxes the troupe from their straight gigs (service jobs, prostitution) back to the Big Top anticipates the getting-the-band-back-together sequence from John Landis' **THE BLUES BROTHERS**. Colizzi recycles some business from his earlier films (in **ACE HIGH**, Brock Peters played *another* black aerialist named Thomas and again a character is allowed to survive a mortal bullet wound in order to have the last laugh). Wild East's 2.27:1 transfer of **BOOT HILL** is on par with **DAY OF ANGER**; the image is reasonably colorful, if somewhat grainy, and troubled by some frame damage at reel changes. If the results are not impressive, they are at least satisfying. Only an English language mono track is provided. The disc has been given 10 chapters, a dark, letterboxed 3m 54s theatrical trailer (which emphasizes Woody Strode's participation in the film over Bud Spencer's) from **BOOT HILL**'s limited "GP" release by Film Ventures, a 2m 12s picture gallery and a booklet with accompanying liner notes by Chas Balun, who declares **BOOT HILL** "satisfyingly violent."

## EMANUELLE IN AMERICA

*Emanuelle nera in America*  
aka **BRUTAL NIGHTS**  
1976, Blue Underground,  
DD-2.0/16:9/LB/+, \$29.95,  
99m 50s, DVD-0  
By Tim Lucas

"After all the things that have happened to me, I've always managed to come back," boasts the sleekly spunky Indonesian

doll Emanuelle (Laura Gemser) in this, her fourth *Emanuelle nera* ("Black Emanuelle") outing and the third to be directed by Italian sleaze monger "Joe D'Amato" (aka cinematographer Aristide Massacessi). A fashion photographer specializing in pictures of women who aren't wearing much of anything, and a photojournalist who repeatedly puts her life and virtue on the line for an unspecified NYC newspaper, Emanuelle is the sort of free spirit who could only exist in 1970s cinema. Here we see her disarm a man holding her at gunpoint by felling him; she then readily submits to a weekend of white slavery to get a story (and then has sex with a cab driver in exchange for the price of a dress when she escapes the danger semi-nude); enjoys a *menage à trois* with a supposedly conservative Venetian duke (Gabriele Tinti, Gemser's real-life husband) and duchess (the "extraordinary participation" of Paola Senatore); and enters into an ill-advised affair with a Washington DC politician, in order to expose his connection to a snuff film ring—only to have him dose her with LSD and teach her that watching murder on celluloid, while being serviced from the rear, is kind of exciting.

Very little of **EMANUELLE IN AMERICA** actually takes place there, but that's just one indication of the irony and self-contradiction that characterizes the script by *Emanuelle nera* veteran Maria Pia Fusco (**BLUEBEARD**, **SALON KITTY**). When Emanuelle, while attending a high society party, discovers a room stocked with art forgeries, her host has the gall to respond to something she says with, "Don't be cynical." Later, after returning home to NYC from her snuff movie jaunt in the

belief that she hallucinated the whole trip, her editor confronts her with the photos she took with the secret mini-camera in her necklace—only to tell her that he has been forbidden to run the story by some "very powerful people"; what makes this episode all the more amusing is that it takes place in the middle of a newspaper layout area, within earshot of dozens of workers, and the revolting snuff photos are left lying on a table, where anyone can see them, as writer and editor continue to walk along and haggle. While the absurdity of these moments seems accidental, the film also takes a few opportunities to poke fun at itself, like the radio bulletin announcing a clash between blacks and whites in Johannesburg as Emanuelle bangs her Caucasian cabbie, and the outrageous climax in which our heroine is named Queen of an African tribe and then hightails it back to civilization with her blonde boyfriend when a movie crew unexpectedly drops in.

Despite this silliness, **EMANUELLE IN AMERICA** is distinguished from other entries in the series by upping the ante with shock value: it was D'Amato's first film to incorporate hardcore sex scenes (fellatio and penetration, none involving Gemser), but even these are less disturbing than some glimpses of simulated snuff footage (with makeup by **ZOMBIE HOLOCAUST**'s Gianetto De Rossi—what a day on the set this must have been!), and the scene of a nude Maria Renata Franco stroking what separates the stallions from the mares. (One hastens to mention that, while the latter scene is often exaggeratedly described as depicting bestiality, it is



actually limited to a few very light, teasing caresses of the horse; there is no coupling involved, and the thoroughbred never crosses the finish line.) Most of this excess feels unnecessary (D'Amato added the porn scenes only to satisfy the French market), and as for the thankfully *faux* snuff footage, it isn't as believable as its notoriety (fostered by smeary, imagination-prodding bootleg copies) suggests. The cinematography is colorful and pretty, but the actors are so singularly unemotive, the walk-and-talk set-ups are so boring, the sex is so unerotic, and the narrative itself is frankly so stupid that the explosive elements aren't bolstered by any dramatic gunpowder whatsoever. Nevertheless, the film briefly rises to its own occasion in the scene where Emanuelle must feign sexual arousal in the face of those brutal 8mm snuff

movies—a scene that may have inspired the forged “found footage” approach of Ruggero Deodato's **CANNIBAL HOLOCAUST** (1979), and which certainly inspired David Cronenberg to write his 1983 film **VIDEODROME** (which he confided to me in a 1981 interview). One can clearly detect in this particular scene not only the germ of Nikki Brand's (Debbie Harry) fatal attraction to S&M porn, but the fact that the politician spikes Emanuelle's drink with acid also suggests points of origin for the hallucinogenic bent and political motivations of **VIDEODROME**.

Blue Underground has accorded **EMANUELLE IN AMERICA** a very respectful presentation, beginning with a 16:9 transfer that squeezes out every meager drop of the film's production value, showing off the Venetian and Manhattan locations to their best advantage.

The 1.83:1 image looks consistently well-composed, but also intermittently grainy, which is in keeping with the limitations of the natural light location photography and not a fault of the transfer. There is one portion at 53:23-30 where the picture turns noticeably poorer, but this is surely a flaw necessitated by Blue Underground's desire to compile the most complete version possible; that it is not one of the more explicit shots only makes its inclusion seem more conscientious and meticulous. Indeed, this disc presentation is so complete that it embodies a version of the film which has never previously existed: a version viewable in English that includes the French hardcore highlights and the original white-on-black end titles, as well. (Most export versions of the film inexplicably concluded with the tacked-on end credits scroll from D'Amato's

*Laura Gemser finds herself sleeping with danger, in the form of a Washington politician involved in a third world snuff movie ring, in EMANUELLE IN AMERICA.*





**EMANUELLE AROUND THE WORLD** [*Emanuelle: Perché violenza alla donna?*, 1977].)

Though the packaging lists the audio as a DD-2.0 mono, it sounds more like a center channel rendering, with no real breadth. Soundtracks are available in English, French and Italian, the latter sounding the best, but there are no English or other subtitle options, which will surely disappoint some purists. A generous 28 chapters are provided.

The extras begin with JOE D'AMATO AND THE BLACK EMANUELLES, a 13m excerpt from an Italian TV profile/interview with the director, who died in 1999. The chain-smoking D'Amato comes across as a likable fellow as he discusses this series, his own feelings about onscreen (and offscreen) eroticism, and his long collaboration with Ms. Gemser; he also shares a candid anecdote involving the late actress Ajita Wilson—whom he confirms to have been a transsexual—and Ricky "Ercolino" Martino, a supporting actor on this production. An extensive Laura Gemser photo/poster gallery is accompanied by an audio interview with Gemser (11m), originally conducted for the Italian fanzine *NOTTURNO*, which is presented in Italian with English subtitles; an introductory card apologizes for its sound quality, which is actually quite listenable. THE UNOFFICIAL EMANUELLE PHENOMENON is a concise print overview of the Euro Emanuelle rip-off phenomenon by David Flint, a contributor to the book TEN YEARS OF TERROR. Talent bios for D'Amato and Gemser round out the package, which will only further Blue Underground's well-deserved reputation as the Criterion of Euro sleaze.

**HALLOWEEN: RESURRECTION**

2002, Dimension Home Video, DD-5.1 & 2.0/MA/16:9/LB/ST/CC/+, \$29.99, 89m 23s, DVD-1

By Shane M. Dallmann

A common sentiment expressed by horror fans old enough to remember being terrified by John Carpenter's **HALLOWEEN** (1978) is how much better things would be in the genre if there had been only one **HALLOWEEN**. Or just one **A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET**. Or just one **HELLRAISER**. With the release of **HALLOWEEN: RESURRECTION**, the eighth film in the series and the seventh to feature the character of the indestructible, white-masked stalker/slasher known as Michael Myers, this sentiment no longer has any practical application. Rather than ask when the Myers saga will end, it's more useful to look at the various ways in which its progenitors try to keep it interesting.

The first **HALLOWEEN** sequel to be taken seriously by a number of critics was the seventh entry, Steve Miner's **HALLOWEEN H20: TWENTY YEARS LATER**. (Bob Graham of THE SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE went so far as to award the film a four-star rating and a slot in his list of the Ten Best Films of the Year!) While stylish and well-crafted, **H20** didn't really break any new ground: its innovation was to completely scrap the fourth, fifth and sixth series entries (never mind the Myers-free **III**)—partially because the mythology involving Michael's origins and ever-expanding family tree was becoming hopelessly convoluted; partially because the death of series mainstay Donald Pleasence effectively derailed the ongoing plot

before it reached its next scheduled stop, and partially because each of these three films was hated a little bit more than the last one by the fans. **H20** returned the story to its near-basics, setting Michael up for a fateful reunion with his sister Laurie (Jamie Lee Curtis)—though not even *this* family tie existed in Carpenter's original. Laurie's kinship with Michael was revealed in Rick Rosenthal's **HALLOWEEN II**, and with **HALLOWEEN: RESURRECTION**, Rosenthal became the first director in the history of the series to helm more than one installment (though John Carpenter reshot some material for **II** after Rosenthal called it a wrap).

While **HALLOWEEN: RESURRECTION** (written by Larry Brand and Sean Hood from Brand's original story) represents an attempt to do something different, there's the obligatory old business to resolve first. Michael's apparent decapitation at the hands of Laurie at the end of **H20** is explained as the result of a variation on the old **REVENGE OF FRANKENSTEIN** switcheroo, and Laurie (again played by a deliberately haggard-looking Curtis) has been committed to an asylum in the aftermath. But her apparent trauma is only a front—she knows Michael will eventually get to her, but she's not going to be caught napping. The inevitable dramatic encounter takes place, seemingly resolving the Michael/Laurie plot before the film's title hits the screen, after which the main story begins.

During Michael's absence, his childhood home in Haddonfield, Illinois has been "tricked up" for a special live Halloween night webcast of "Dangertainment,"





*Michael Myers is wired for murder once again in HALLOWEEN: RESURRECTION, as effective a genre series "last gasp" as you're likely to see.*

an online reality show run by Freddie Harris (top-billed actor/rapper Busta Rhymes) and his assistant Nora (supermodel Tyra Banks). Freddie and Nora have auditioned and chosen six young people to spend the night in the Myers house, each equipped with a miniature "lipstick camera" through which the Web audience can see and hear everything they do. The contestants include the easily-frightened Sara Moyer (Bianca Kajlich), her best friend Jen (Katee Sackhoff), aspiring chef Rudy (Sean Patrick Thomas), goofball Bill (Thomas Ian Nicholas), *faux*-philosopher Jim (Luke Kirby) and his obligatory sex/skin interest Donna (Daisy McCrackin). Naturally, the six are expected to uncover phony clues to Michael's childhood and, eventually, to be terrorized by a phony Michael... and inevitably, the Real Thing shows up before too long. But Sara has a guardian angel of sorts in the form of a palm-pilot friend she knows as "Deckard," but who is really a shy high-schooler named Myles Berton (Ryan Merriman): in a

subplot, Myles attracts an entire houseful of Halloween revelers who join him in watching the "Dangertainment" special as it unfolds.

Since the basic plot still involves a masked madman decimating the ranks of a group of young adults, there's no way that **HALLOWEEN: RESURRECTION** can achieve anything resembling legitimate classic status. Nonetheless this writer, who found even **H2O** considerably overrated, and who approached this follow-up with understandable cynicism, found himself in for a pleasant surprise. Director Rosenthal has learned a lot over the years, and **HALLOWEEN: RESURRECTION** contains many deliberate attempts to force the series in a new direction—most of which involve the abandonment of tradition. Rosenthal's **HALLOWEEN II** tried very hard to end the story with the fiery demises of both Michael and Pleasence's Dr. Loomis. While the luxury of a "definitive" ending is denied here, subtle but defiant evidence of a similar desire (not to *end* things, but to *change* things) comes with Rosenthal's return. Observe:

there is no jack-o-lantern to be found in the opening title sequence; there is no attempt whatsoever to invoke the memory of Loomis; and at least one other major series convention is rendered inoperable by the end of the film. Humor also plays a greater role than before—some of it unsubtle character comedy (primarily and unsurprisingly courtesy of the Rhymes character), but some of it slyly poking fun at the fickle loyalties of the pop culture audience. It's telling when Myles and his friend Scott (Billy Kay) attract no recognition at all when they attend a Halloween party dressed as the **PULP FICTION** hitmen—by contrast, one wonders how many viewers will get the "vote you off the island" gag in another ten years.

The "scare" material is similarly successful. While long-time **HALLOWEEN** veterans aren't likely to ever be frightened by Michael Myers again, Rosenthal still pulls off some eerie "reveals" and a couple of good, old-fashioned jolts. The two elements come together in the film's most controversial scene (not part of the original script) in which a



phony Michael Myers encounters the real one and, believing him to be another fake, mercilessly browbeats him—even going so far as to repeatedly jab his finger into his forehead. Some fans complained bitterly about the scene—but it’s effectively staged, suspenseful, humorous, and not without consequence, as Michael is inadvertently advised of the location of a victim he might otherwise have missed. The film is neither as gore-free as the original, nor as graphic as a **FRIDAY THE 13TH** film—no one should feel either slighted or overwhelmed in that department. Michael himself (who is no longer billed as “The Shape” in the end credits) is played by stunt coordinator Brad Loree, who certainly bears one of the better presences seen in the role. And perhaps best of all, the modern webcast technology is integral to the film as opposed to being a mere gimmick (invoke **THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT** if you must, but the “shaky-cam” footage is minor and the concept isn’t really the same). For many years, audiences have enjoyed screaming advice at on-screen characters who, of course, can neither see nor hear them—but thanks to the up-to-date concept, **HALLOWEEN: RESURRECTION** features what may be the first such character who *can* receive and react to such advice from an “audience member” within the film! Neither a post-**SCREAM** “know-it-all” thriller nor a weary, by-the-numbers rehash (such as **VALENTINE**), **HALLOWEEN: RESURRECTION** is just different enough to be enjoyable; and while fans will never reach a unanimous agreement, there are plenty of reasons to consider it the best of the Michael Myers sequels. For a

movie that should never have been made, it isn’t bad at all.

Dimension Home Video has brought **HALLOWEEN: RESURRECTION** to DVD in a fine, letterboxed (2.30:1) transfer with 16:9 enhancement (at the very least, a rental of this DVD would be far preferable to any pan-and-scan cable or VHS experience), a choice of either a constantly-active Dolby Digital 5.1 Surround soundtrack or a more traditional 2.0 mix, and a generous supplemental package that explores the production from top to bottom. Rosenthal joins editor Robert A. Ferretti (who, thanks to the multiple web and security cameras utilized alongside the traditional equipment, had quite a job to tackle) on the feature commentary. In addition to plenty of discussion about the complicated set-up and shoot itself, the two disclose elements about the film that never came to be. For example, the original plan called for the film to open (*sans* credits) with Super-8 footage of Michael’s childhood—but would it have been the “real” thing, or would it have turned out to be one of Freddie’s phony clues? Rosenthal points out certain tribute shots to previous **HALLOWEEN** films (a few others pass by without mention), as well as a *homage* to Dario Argento (to whom he refers as a filmmaker of the ’60s and ’70s), but apparently fails to notice that an early murder involving a camera tripod comes straight out of **PEEPING TOM**!

The director returns to provide optional commentary for several additional supplements, starting with a selection of deleted scenes, including the full versions of the audition interviews of the contestants, some extended remorse on the part of Freddie, and a bit in which

Michael parks his stolen car close to home. Three alternate endings are also provided: extensive reshoots delayed the release of this film from the spring of 2002 to the summer (an actual Halloween release was never in the cards), and indecision about how to end the picture accounted for much of this. “Deckard” is given more hands-on action in one alternative, Loree gets an unmasked cameo (though not as Michael) in another, and a third involves one climax too many for the principals—the predictable but still creepy coda used in the final cut was the best choice.

Rosenthal also plays host to a 41m 17s “Web Cam Special,” consisting of all such footage shot by the contestants (all six actors carried live web cams throughout the shoot). It’s explained that this footage was preserved for a planned interactive DVD that would allow a viewer to watch the film from the perspective of any selected character. (But would they really be hearing the soundtrack music?) Meanwhile, the commentary offers yet another huge sampling of shooting information. Production designer Troy Hansen hosts the “Tour of Set” supplement (6m 53s)—it’s not apparent in the film that the Myers house was built on a soundstage and provided with CGI backdrops to suggest its outdoor existence, but Hansen happily shows and tells all. “On Set With Jamie Lee Curtis” (4m 5s) and “Head Cam Featurette” (4m 12s) appear to be extracts from a longer, typical “making of” program (clapperboards are seen identifying the film by the thankfully-scraped moniker HALL8WEEN). And finally, five major sequences are offered in “storyboard comparison” mode.



The feature has been assigned a reasonable 14 chapters—subtitles are available in English and Spanish, and a French-language soundtrack is provided as an option. Bonus trailers are included for **H20**, the much-reviled sixth entry **HALLOWEEN: THE CURSE OF MICHAEL MYERS**, the “Ultimate **SCREAM**” box set, Martin Scorsese’s **GANGS OF NEW YORK** (?) and a generic sampling of other Dimension titles. If you see only one slasher sequel this year...

## THE HEAD

*Die Nackte und der Satan*  
1959/62, Alpha Video, DD-2.0,  
\$7.98, 90m 56s, DVD-0  
By Tim Lucas

Possibly the first European horror film to combine horror, eroticism and sleaze in such equal portions, this B&W West German shocker was the last film written and directed by Victor Trivas—best known for the Nazi-banned **Niemandland** [US: **NO MAN’S LAND**, 1931] and his art direction of G.W. Pabst’s silent classic **Die Liebe der Jeanne Ney** [US: **THE LOVES OF JEANNE NEY**, 1927]. It will never be as shocking again as it was when it was first released in its homeland, with some spicy adult material included, but it has aged into something equally curious: an amalgam of silent expressionism, creepy, sin-drenched carnality and weird pulp futurism—some of which is due to production designer Herman Warm, the man responsible for the look of Lang’s **Die Spinnen** [THE SPIDERS, 1919], Wiene’s **Das Kabinett des Doktor Caligari** [THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI, 1919], and Dreyer’s **La Passion de la Jeanne d’Arc** [THE

**PASSION OF JOAN OF ARC**, 1927] and **Vampyr** (1932). It was Warm’s last film, as well. A personal favorite of director Curtis Harrington, **THE HEAD** is almost certainly the first FRANKENSTEIN-derived film to explore the Galatea complex by showing its mad doctor make an unmistakable pass at his near-naked female creation. In this way, it shows itself remarkably ahead (forgive the pun) of its time, as it anticipates some key films of the 1960s, like **THE BRAIN THAT WOULDN’T DIE** (1962) and **THE FROZEN DEAD** (1967), and of the 1970s, notably **LADY FRANKENSTEIN** (1971) and **FLESH FOR FRANKENSTEIN** (1973).

“You have a strange name, Dr. Ood.” The character who makes this apt observation doesn’t know the half of it. Supposedly orphaned by a shipwreck as an infant and named after the wreckage (the S.S. Ood, if you can buy that), Dr. Ood is a mysterious stranger who appears one night on the doorstep of Dr. Abel (Michel Simon), offering to assist his weird medical experiments. Abel, who has kept the severed head of a dog alive with his new discovery “Serum Z,” is ready and willing to transplant the head of Sister Irene Sanders (Karin Kernke), a willing, hunch-backed nun—mind you, she’s only a “nurse” in the English dubbing—onto a nubile body, but his ailing heart suddenly places him at the top of the guinea pig list, in an operation to be conducted by Ood’s and Abel’s longtime associate, Dr. Walter Burke (Kurt Müller-Graf). When Abel dies during surgery, Ood determines to keep the head and its brilliant intellect alive by hooking it up to the old dog rig, against the suddenly moralistic wishes of Burke, whom Ood

stabs to death in a fit of ambition. Once Abel’s head is activated to remorseful consciousness, Ood proceeds with Sister Irene’s full-body transplant, obtaining the body of a local stripper named Lilly (Christiane Maybach), whom he has recognized as Stella, a husband-poisoner whom he gave a different face when he still went by his real name of Brandt. Dr. Brandt, in turn, was the patient of a Dr. Hartmann, who experimented on his brain to endow it with genius—but, as Ood has discovered, “The price of genius is madness!” Awakening from her operation three months later, Irene abandons her amorous creator and finds her way to Lilly’s old stomping grounds, The Tam-Tam Club, where she takes up with the dancer’s former lover, artist Paul Lerner (**SLAUGHTER OF THE VAMPIRES**’ Dieter Eppler), who recognizes his missing lover’s birthmarks while sketching her.

Produced by Rapid Film (which followed through with the similarly sexed-up **HORRORS OF SPIDER ISLAND** [*Ein Toter hing im Netz*] in 1960), **THE HEAD** was released in the US by Trans/Lux Distributing Corporation in 1962. The original had a reported running time of 97m, and watching this significantly shorter domestic version, it is easy to discern from the splices where cuts were made: when Ood first ambles into The Tam-Tam Club (10:25); when the striptease music abruptly changes after Ood seats himself (12:10); when Ood drugs Stella (44:41); after the shots of the operating room equipment prior to Ood saying “I want you to follow this operation, Abel” (46:27); and again as Irene prepares to strip to admire her new body in a full-length mirror





*The diabolical Dr. Ood (Horst Frank, right) preserves the living brain of brilliant colleague Dr. Abel (Michel Simon) in the remarkably weird German film **THE HEAD**.*

(57:02). Even without this footage—which may or may not have included nudity—the film conveys an attitude of cold lasciviousness and contains more shots of women fondling their own breasts than was commonly seen at kiddie matinees in the early 1960s. A significant drain on the film's energy, however, is the score attributed to Willy Mattes (who wrote the more conventional cues, performed by The Erwin Lehn Orchestra) and Jacques Lasry (responsible for the experimental music loop heard throughout the picture, which sounds a little like Miles Davis playing the same two notes over one of Brian Eno's more cyclical ambient

pieces). In the end, one wants to like **THE HEAD** much more than one does; it would seem to have everything going for it—a spicy weird menace pulp story, eerie atmosphere, creepy performances, unwholesome sex, *avant-garde* music—but there is some other factor, perhaps its droning soundtrack, that causes everything to succumb to encroaching languor. While we would recommend it to anyone interested in the earliest stirrings of the Euro horror revival, **THE HEAD** is unlikely to win over anyone who didn't live through its period until its missing footage is restored. Of course, a crisp digital remaster from the negative and the origi-

nal German soundtrack might make all the difference.

Alpha Video's DVD is beautifully packaged (their colorist does some inspired work), but the presentation is no more than barely acceptable. Soft-looking with an airy soundtrack, it appears to have originated from a decent 16mm source and is basically on par with Sinister Cinema's VHS release. There are only six chapter marks, all of them untitled. It would be a shame if this budget-priced DVD was as good as it was going to get for this title, but if you're curious, or just want the convenience of having the film on disc, go for it. It's not a bad alternative till the real goods come along.





*Barbara Rush figures in one of the delirious promotional images concocted by Universal-International to sell the 3-D thrills of IT CAME FROM OUTER SPACE.*

## IT CAME FROM OUTER SPACE

1953, Universal Studios,  
DD-3.0/ST/CC/MA/+,  
79m 59s, \$19.98, DVD-1

*By Tim Lucas*

The first film to fuse a science fiction premise with the then-futuristic screen process of "3 Dimension," **IT CAME FROM OUTER SPACE** ushered Universal-International into a more competitive race than the studio had ever known with its horror films of the 1930s and '40s, an output that no other studio had been able or willing to seriously challenge. Though still a young decade, the 1950s had already seen the release of **DESTINATION MOON**, **ROCKETSHIP X-M** (both 1950), **THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL**, **THE**

**THING FROM ANOTHER WORLD** and **WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE** (all 1951), **RED PLANET MARS** (1952) and **INVADERS FROM MARS** (1953)—and this is only a short list of genre highlights. Nevertheless, this single title managed to nail a distinctive "house style" for U-I's science fiction releases that would serve the company in good stead throughout the decade, reaching its arguable apex with Joseph Newman's **THIS ISLAND EARTH** (1955) and **THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN** (1957). Based on an original screen treatment by Ray Bradbury, then only 33 years old, and entrusted to the direction of 37 year-old tyro director Jack Arnold (whose only previous fiction feature, the delinquency drama **GIRLS IN THE NIGHT**, was released only

a few months earlier), **IT CAME FROM OUTER SPACE** stands as an impressive fusion of the philosophies of its predecessors: the cosmos-embracing curiosity and good will of **THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL**, the invasion angle of **THE THING FROM ANOTHER WORLD** and the eerie paranoia of **RED PLANET MARS**.

Richard Carlson stars as astronomer John Putnam, a loner who has withdrawn from the impersonality of city living to a smaller, friendlier Arizona town. While stargazing with girlfriend Ellen Fields (Barbara Rush), he witnesses the flaming arc of an unidentified flying object that crashes into the nearby desert, creating a huge impact crater. Investigating the crash site of what is presumed to be a meteor, Putnam gets a glimpse of



a space craft and an alien life form, but a deliberately induced avalanche covers up all evidence that could verify his story. Ridiculed by the townsfolk for his sense of wonder, Putnam and Ellen also become the first to realize that some members of the community have been possessed by the visiting alien intelligence, who are gelatinous creatures capable of travelling by electrical impulse through telephone wires, and who require physical bodies of muscle and sinew to rebuild their damaged spacecraft.

While there is much about this film that is eerie and unsettling in a pre-**INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS** way, it is the air of speculation and wonder in **IT CAME FROM OUTER SPACE**, rooted in Putnam's welcoming attitude toward the mysteries of the universe, that is most assertive. Considering the time in which it was made, this approach is also tempting to interpret metaphorically as a plea to be less fearful and resistant to the differences between people, societies and ideologies; though an external and internal invasion does take place, the end result is a peaceful, cooperative venture. Director Jack Arnold, who parlayed this success into a career as U-I's principal sci-fi man (**CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON**, **REVENGE OF THE CREATURE**, **TARANTULA**, **THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN**), is often credited with the film's "vision," but when one sees how much of Arnold's signature style is shared by films he did not direct, including **THIS ISLAND EARTH** (1955) and even **ABBOTT & COSTELLO GO TO MARS** (1953), one becomes more inclined to credit his ace cinematographer Clifford Stine with

deciding the film's particular flavor. Especially when viewed in its original 3-D process, Stine's spatial compositions—which sometimes involve as many as seven different layers (eg., fog, foregrounded rocks, mountain surface, spaceship surface, spaceship door, creature inside, alien ship device in the very deep distance—many of these lending their own distinct movements to an otherwise static camera setup)—are so masterly and subtle that they make 99% of other 3-D photography seem crassly overstated. Even simple shots, such as the two-shot of Carlson conversing with Sheriff Matt Warren (Charles Drake) at the crash site at 24:51, is composed in such a way that the two men are arranged in depth with an additional impressive layer of sky behind them; Stine then proceeds to top himself with the unexpected depth of the reverse shot, which finds Carlson foregrounded by the coat slung over his shoulder and with no fewer than six dimensional reference points in the deep desert vista behind Drake. If Stine's work loses some of its vertiginous, visceral impact when flattened out to standard 2-D, as it is on Universal's DVD, it still works by virtue of its unearthly poise, but here the film's impact owes more to the imaginative art direction of Hitchcock's great production designer Robert F. Boyle and Bernard Herzbrun. The climax of the picture—which encompasses plummets into deep ravines, Putnam dodging ray gun beams that dig deep trenches into the cave wall behind him, and the slow, dimensional reveal of a gelid, cyclopean "xenomorph" (not at all like the tentacled, two-eyed beastie threatening the cast on the DVD cover)—involves

some still-fairly-spectacular special effects photography, courtesy of Roswell A. Hoffmann and David S. Horsley, all of which is actually more impressive than the celebrated, but rather clumsy, opening shot of the meteor crashing directly into the camera.

Although **IT CAME FROM OUTER SPACE** is said to have been projected theatrically in a 1.85:1 ratio, Universal's DVD presents it in standard 1.33 format. It looks so perfectly composed in standard ratio that absolutely no loss is felt at any time; in fact, with only a few exceptional shots, the film zooms well on a wide-screen monitor. The picture quality is perfect, with the sharp clarity of the image going a long way toward suggesting the original three-dimensional impact of Stine's photography. As with their previous VHS release, Universal has included the film's theatrical stereo sound in a DD-3.0 mix, which is crude in comparison with today's stereo surround soundscapes, but is full of directional effects and a pleasurable addition to the presentation. Spanish and French subtitles are included, as well as English captioning.

Film historian Tom Weaver provides a running audio commentary that manages to surpass even his great Universal Classic Monsters commentaries in its wealth of sheer detail. Weaver not only gained access to the film's original production log, making it possible for him to assign individual shots to specific dates and times of day (!), but his own experience of interviewing several key contributors has enabled him to fulfill the ultimate journalistic role of comparing various subjective stories and arriving at probable truths. His most impor-



tant call here is the discrediting of credited screenwriter Harry Essex's involvement in the script, which consisted almost entirely of the inexperienced Bradbury's overlong treatment. As listeners to Weaver's **CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON** commentary will recall, he has made it his mission to deflect the lime-light from Jack Arnold, and to point out his various directorial gaffes, since uncovering studio documentation that contradicted the director's boasts of directing the Metaluna scenes of **THIS ISLAND EARTH**; in the case of this commentary, Arnold's contribution receives very little attention—but, on the other hand, Weaver is never at a loss for other interesting things to say, observe and reveal.

Arnold's contribution is not neglected, however, by the disc's major supplement, the documentary **THE UNIVERSE ACCORDING TO UNIVERSAL** (31m 32s), written and directed by David J. Skal, narrated by Rudy Behlmer, and featuring the onscreen commentary of composer Irving Gertz, film historians Paul M. Jensen (again proving himself one of the most astute genre observers around) and Bob Burns, artist Vincent Di Fate, music producer David Schechter and 3-D film archivist Bob Furmanek. This overview of the studio's science fiction output traces Universal's interest in science fiction back to the Karloff/Lugosi vehicle **THE INVISIBLE RAY** (1936), but it sells its own breadth short by omitting any discussion of Universal's numerous science fiction serials of the '30s and '40s. Behlmer's narration, as written by Skal, also credits Jack Arnold with co-direction of **THIS ISLAND EARTH**, a careless repetition of accepted "facts"

that implicitly contradicts Tom Weaver's revelatory research into the subject. Bob Burns displays a recreation of the Xenomorph and defends its fidelity to the real thing, though its mantling shroud of polyethylene and its gnarled clawed arms run far afield from its actual mantle of shaggy, seaweed-like hair and its mist-effusing, cotton fuzz-tufted arms. Despite these flaws, it's an entertaining and slickly produced half-hour study that provides a nice chaser to the main feature.

A photo/poster gallery is also included, along with bios (for five cast members and Jack Arnold) and a very short and unnecessary set of Production Notes, redundant in light of the research found elsewhere on the disc, which conclude with a colorized shot of an unidentified space girl in a revealing Jetsons-style outfit, holding an unexplained long-playing record album. (The colorization work on the menu screens and the packaging is exemplary.) Lastly, there is also a "Coming Soon" trailer (1m 14s) that, unfortunately, doesn't have the charm of the general release trailer (not included here) in which a suave Richard Carlson explained what audiences could expect from the picture and the "miracle of Third Dimension."

### **MAD MONSTER PARTY**

1967, Anchor Bay Entertainment, DD-2.0/CC/+, \$19.98, 94m 49s, DVD-1

**By Shane M. Dallmann**

Tim Lucas reviewed a less-than-stellar tape release of this Rankin-Bass "Animagic" creature feature back in VW 51:16. His suggestion at that time was that a fresh transfer from original materials would have been an improvement over the

color-faded 16mm print utilized there—and Anchor Bay has now proven him right. For the first time, **MAD MONSTER PARTY?** (as punctuated on the film itself, but not on either the publicity materials or the DVD packaging) has come to home video in a beautiful rendition of the 35mm original.

The restored colors seen on this disc are as exciting as one could hope for—and a revelation to those accustomed to the old tapes or the TV airings of days gone by. Francesca's flame-red hair, the bubbling, rainbow-hued contents of the drugstore beakers and the mad doctor's test tubes, the outfits of the various and sundry characters (just about everyone's favorite monster is represented here, of course)—all help hold the viewer's attention even if the film itself remains slightly overlong and padded (as its creators readily acknowledge). No enhancement above and beyond the project's original elements was deemed necessary here—no artificial "widescreen" matte was applied to the image, and no 5.1 remix was given to the mono soundtrack (which is more than adequate in two-channel Dolby Digital).

Anchor Bay has also provided a generous handful of supplements for this long-anticipated release. In addition to the theatrical trailer (1m 30s), 20 pieces of production art and over 50 poster/still gallery images can be found on the disc, while the "complete history" of the film is detailed in a 23-page insert booklet (loaded with illustrations, some exclusive to the booklet) by biographer/historian Rick Goldschmidt. In addition to the expected reminiscences involving Arthur Rankin, Jr., Jules Bass, Harvey Kurtzman, Boris Karloff,





*RKO's copyright prevented MAD MONSTER PARTY? from calling him "King Kong," but the identity of its mystery guest is fairly obvious.*

Phyllis Diller and poster artist Jack Davis, Goldschmidt also brings names not usually associated with the project—such as those of Forrest J. Ackerman and Frank Frazetta—into enlightening play. (Ackerman's name has been added to the screenplay credit on Anchor Bay's DVD liner, but not on the film itself, incidentally.) A special edition of the disc (#DV13118), sold exclusively at K-Mart outlets, includes several souvenir postcards, as well. 28 chapters have been assigned to the feature.

As none of the original Animagic figures apparently exist any longer, this Anchor Bay package, all in all, stands as the definitive souvenir of **MAD MONSTER PARTY?**, and its fans will consider it a must. Families with young children may find this a favorite diversion, and the restoration performed here makes it worth at least one more look for anyone else.

## **THE MARK OF ZORRO / DON Q, SON OF ZORRO**

1920/1925, Kino on Video, DD-1.0/+, \$29.95, 106m 48s/110m 44s, DVD-0

### **THE IRON MASK**

1928, Kino on Video, DD-1.0/+, \$29.95, 103m 58s, DVD-0

*By Richard Harland Smith*

Lured away from Broadway in 1915 by the Triangle Film Corporation (named for its triple-threat talent roster of Thomas Ince, Mack Sennett and D. W. Griffith), Douglas Fairbanks' rapid cinematic success helped to bankroll the formation of his own production house. Known for playing plucky boyish leads, Fairbanks' choice to tackle **THE MARK OF ZORRO** was considered something of a stretch. The film's success urged the 37-year-old screen idol (recently wed to "America's Sweetheart," Mary Pickford, with whom he and

Charlie Chaplin co-founded United Artists) toward a career as a swashbuckler in **THE THREE MUSKETEERS** (1921), **ROBIN HOOD** (1922), **THE THIEF OF BAGDAD** (1924), **THE BLACK PIRATE** (1926) and **DON Q, SON OF ZORRO** (a 1925 sequel to **THE MARK OF ZORRO**). Kino on Video has released Fairbanks' Zorro films together on one dual-layer DVD, and his 1928 silent film swan song, **THE IRON MASK** (a sequel to **THE THREE MUSKETEERS**) on a separate disc. Old school swashbuckling doesn't get much better than this.

The plot of **THE MARK OF ZORRO** (adapted from a serialized story by former police reporter Johnston McCulley) will ring a bell for anyone familiar with the remakes starring Tyrone Power or Frank Langella, or with Edgar Ulmer's **THE PIRATES OF CAPRI** [reviewed VW 72:64], which set its action on the 18th Century Amalfi coast but changed little



else. Newly returned from his studies in Spain, Don Diego de Vega (Fairbanks) leads a double life: by day, he is known as the "idle, bloodless" scion of a proud family and, by night, as the avenger Zorro, a cunning swordsman committed to saving California from a corrupt *gobernador* (whose enforcers include Noah Beery, as a bumbling *rurale*). For modern viewers, Fairbanks may seem an unlikely adventure hero; in his silk cape, wide-brimmed *sombrero* and raccoon mask, the undersized actor more closely resembles the McDonalds Hamburglar than Guy Williams or Antonio Banderas. When Zorro makes his first entrance (wielding a pistol instead of a sword, and wreathed in cheroot smoke), Fairbanks seems to be sending up a genre that has scarcely been

born—until he starts moving. An amateur gymnast, Fairbanks worked exhaustively on his own stunts, which anticipated by 50 years the gravity-defying acrobatics of Hong Kong superstar Jackie Chan. Slow to start, **THE MARK OF ZORRO** kicks into high gear for a second half that consists of several invigorating chases and cliffhangers that set the standard for swashbucklers to come.

Directed by ex-vaudevillian Fred Niblo (who helmed the 1926 **BEN-HUR**), **THE MARK OF ZORRO** is patterned after the silent era's popular Westerns, but its use of sliding panels (Zorro comes and goes through a trick grandfather clock, à la Jean Rollin's *Le Frisson des Vampires*) looks ahead to the vogue for haunted house thrillers on the order of Roland West's **THE BAT**

(1926) and Paul Leni's **THE CAT AND THE CANARY** (1927). The film's follow-up, **DON Q, SON OF ZORRO** (1925), inclines even farther toward these Gothic trappings. Set 30 years after the events of the first film, **DON Q** follows the return of Zorro's son, Don César (Fairbanks again) to Spain, where he establishes himself among the *caballeros* as "the Californian with the whip." When his rival (a Mephistophelean Donald Crisp, who also directed) for the affection of a nobleman's daughter (19-year-old Mary Astor) frames him for the murder of a visiting Archduke (Warner Oland), Don César fakes his own death—only to return by night to clear his name and claim the woman he loves. With a budget larger than that for **THE MARK OF ZORRO**, **DON Q** is the more visually impressive work;

Douglas Fairbanks Sr. as the masked avenger, making fools of his opponents in *THE MARK OF ZORRO*.





while its city setting and preponderance of interior setpieces cost the film some forward momentum, director Crisp and cinematographer Henry Sharp (**DR. CYCLOPS**) get expressive use out of matte paintings, miniatures and double exposures, which allow Don César to be reunited onscreen in the exciting finale with his look-alike father (in his old age makeup, Fairbanks resembles horror host Zacherley).

Neither **THE MARK OF ZORRO** or **DON Q, SON OF ZORRO** have benefitted from film restoration and the prints used for these 1.33:1 transfers show their age in speckles, stains and other frame damage. For silent film enthusiasts (and interested neophytes), these blemishes will hardly detract from films that still thrill almost a century later. Both prints are color tinted for exterior, interior and night scenes and boast running times longer than usually reported (suggesting that the films are being projected here at their appropriate speed). The spirited original piano music for both features was composed by Jon C. Mirsalis. Both films have been given 12 chapters and the supplements on this double-feature disc make this a very attractive package. Excerpted from the TV series **THE SILENT YEARS** are host Orson Welles' opening (6m 19s) and closing (6m 48s) remarks about his friend "Doug Senior," whose charm lay in "a sort of innocent arrogance." Clips from Fairbanks' earlier films (**AMERICANO**) are provided, as well as from his 1930 "talkie" **REACHING FOR THE MOON**. "Home Movies" (5m 33s) consist mostly of Fairbanks' studies of athletes and gymnasts performing feats on the United Artists backlot, although the man himself does appear near the end

of the reel. "Fairbanks Vs. Dempsey" (25s) comes from a Pathé newsreel showing actor and pugilist faking a face-off for a crowd of skimmed fight fans, and "Making Life Worth While" is a collection of Fairbanks' motivational writings.

Allan Dwan's sprawling **THE IRON MASK** is both a sequel to his earlier **THE THREE MUSKETEERS** (in which Fairbanks had played the plucky Gascon D'Artagnan) and the actor's *adieu* to swashbucklers and silent films. Based on the writings of the elder Alexandre Dumas, **THE IRON MASK** finds the four Musketeers embroiled in a plot by Minister of State Richelieu (**THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME**'s Nigel de Brulier) to conceal from expectant father Louis XIII (Rolfe Sedan) the birth of a second *dauphin* ("One heir means peace to France—two may mean revolution"). The murder of D'Artagnan's beloved Constance (**THE MARK OF ZORRO**'s Marguerite de la Motte) at the behest of Richelieu's cohort, the Count de Rochefort (Ulrich Haupt), compels "the last blade in France" to swear vengeance against the Cardinal—until events conspire to place the imperiled prince in D'Artagnan's custody and to separate him from his fellow Musketeers forever. **THE IRON MASK** manages to walk a fine line between camp (the four Musketeers sleep together in one bed—in a *closet*, no less) and faithful adaptation (honoring the body count of the source novels by laying waste to 99% of the *dramatis personae*). Photographed by Henry Sharp, the film drips with Gothic atmosphere, from the outsized shadows that attend the abduction of the mature Louis XIV (a dual role for William Blakewell) in a grotto below St. Germain to the rescue of the rightful heir from River

Castle (a glorious traveling matte) during a lightning and thunder storm. Dwan's assistant on **THE IRON MASK** was H. Bruce "Lucky" Humberstone, who cut his teeth on a number of Poverty Row horrors before graduating to several installments of the "Charlie Chan" series, starring Warner Oland.

Fully restored under the auspices of the UK Channel Four Television from an original nitrate print preserved by New York's Museum of Modern Art, **THE IRON MASK** is stunningly represented by this 1.33:1 transfer. The image is silvery (color tinting isn't missed) and clear, with astonishing levels of contrast. This version features alternate synchronized sound speeches by Fairbanks, as a prologue (2m 27s) and again near the film's midway point (a 28s summing up), just before commencement of the action "twenty years after." (Taken from Vitaphone sound discs, this aural restoration is more interesting than satisfying, as the fidelity leaves a little something to be desired.) **THE IRON MASK** clocks in at 103m 58s (most sources cite a running time of 87m), only 50s of which are devoted to credits related to the digital restoration. Befitting this costume extravaganza is a fully orchestrated score by Carl Davis, performed by the City of Prague Philharmonic.

The disc has been encoded with 14 chapters, and again the compliment of bonus materials is extremely worthwhile. "Rare Outtakes" catch Doug Senior making various attempts at window rescue (3m 31s), crossing swords with villain Ulrich Haupt (4m 13s) and reuniting with his Musketeer pals (3m 31s); all of these botched



takes are presented with a handy option to view the scene as it appears in the final film. A segment of the re-release "alternate version" forfeits intertitles in favor of spoken narration by Fairbanks' son, Douglas Junior, and the "Animated Gallery of Artwork and Photographs" is a 9m 15s slide show of watercolor renderings, charcoal sketches, behind-the-scenes photos, production stills and ad art, all beautifully reproduced. The program book for the film's 1999 British re-release is included as a text supplement, offering fascinating historical insights (Dumas père based the character of

D'Artagnan on the historical exploits of Charles de Batz-Castlemore, who died in the service of King Louis XIV in 1673 at the Siege of Maastricht), appreciative profiles of Fairbanks (one by his son), and the recollections of Allan Dwan (taken from interviews conducted by Peter Bogdanovich in 1971 and Kevin Brownlow in 1975) and the designers who planned and built the film's 54 sets and executed its miniature work. Both of these DVDs from Kino on Video are handsomely authored and majestically packaged, as is befitting a king of the silent era.

## THE NAKED WITCH / CRYPT OF DARK SECRETS

1961/1976 *Something Weird Video/Image Entertainment*, DD-1.0/MA/+, \$24.98, 59m 1s/71m 19s, DVD-1  
By **Bill Cooke**

Before Larry Buchanan became known as the man who remade AIP genre films for TV (epitomized by the ever-popular **ZONTAR, THE THING FROM VENUS**, 1966), he spent the better part of the 1950s cranking out obscure Westerns in Texas until the day he was approached by road-showman Claude Alexander (purveyor of Kroger Babb's VD scare film **MOM AND DAD**, 1945) and asked if he could make a horror picture for the pauperly sum of \$8,000. The end result, **THE NAKED WITCH**, is described by its maker as "one of those desperate movies we make when we want to be movie makers and we have nowhere to go, and no funding, and no *nothing*!" To compensate for his lack of resources, Buchanan delivered the goods that the title promised and chose one of the most unusual locations of any horror film: a quaint German settlement in a picturesque pocket of southern Texas, where 19th century stone dwellings, cascading waterfalls, giant boulders and fields of tall grass and wildflowers combined to create an utterly unique Euro-American, fairy tale milieu.

The simplistic plot tells of a young man, referred to in the credits as The Student (Robert Short), who travels to the unspoiled German-Texas town of Luckenbach to research witchcraft for a thesis paper. He finds the locals to be tight-lipped on the subject, but soon wins the confidence of Kirska, the

*Dorothy Revier as the treacherous Milady de Winter in Allan Dwan's Musketeer swashbuckler, THE IRON MASK.*





innkeeper's daughter (Jo Maryman), after he flirtingly tells her, "With your German good looks set off with something simple and black, you'd look like a little cameo!" Moments later, she appears in his room wearing a black negligée and produces an old book wherein the Student learns of the terrible epidemic that wiped out one-third of the settlers in their first year in Texas. He also reads about the mysterious woman known as the Widow (Libby Hall), who was accused of being a witch by her lover, innkeeper Otto Shernig, and put to death by rabble-roused townspeople in need of a scapegoat for their troubles. Unable to sleep, the Student finds the Widow's grave and uncovers her mummified corpse by the eerie, pale glow of day-for-night. Pulling a stake out of her ribs, the young man is horrified to see the face begin to recompose. He runs from the scene, even as the Widow fully reconstitutes and rises from the hole, nubile and nude. Having sworn that "All Shernigs must die!" the witch systematically murders her executioner's descendants, taking the occasional break to swim fetchingly in a pond full of lily pads. It is during one of these nocturnal skinny-dips that the witch seduces the insomniac Student and lures him back to her cave to lollygag beneath her spell. Will the young man be able to regain his senses long enough to save the last of the Shernigs—his precious cameo, Kirska—before the widow witch consummates her curse?

There is plenty wrong with **THE NAKED WITCH**. In an effort to pad the film to feature length, an uncredited Gary Owens lectures us for 8m on medieval witchcraft practices over repeated views of Bosch paintings (accompanied by Bernard



*Libby Hall as the seductive sorceress of Larry Buchanan's \$8,000 horror debut, **THE NAKED WITCH**.*

Herrmann's music for **THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL**) before the credits even kick in; the soundtrack is woefully deprived throughout, often relying on Robert Short's monotonic narration to tell us what characters are saying in what should be involving dialogue scenes; and the organ music that saturates much of the film sounds like it was improvised on the spot. However, the film is not without its positive qualities. Buchanan had a special love for this idyllic countryside and a flair for framing its varying landscapes (he returned to Luckenbach in 1970 to make his "Bergmanesque" art film **STAWBERRIES NEED RAIN**). Just as interesting to look at is the spare interior of the Student's bedroom, where the director achieves near-expressionistic compositions drawn from thrusting bedposts, a cuckoo clock and the faces of his strikingly beautiful female leads. (The economical use of blank walls and minimal set pieces is reminiscent of William Cameron

Menzies' police station set in **INVADERS FROM MARS**, 1953). Of the amateur cast, the doe-like Jo Maryman proves most adept at delivering lines, but it's ultimately Libby Hall's film. Made up with exaggerated "evil" eyebrows, she slinks around by day-for-moonlight in a physical performance that is similar but superior to that other pantomiming *femme fantastique* of the drive-in screens: Shirley Kilpatrick as **THE ASTOUNDING SHE MONSTER** (1958).

**THE NAKED WITCH** was shot in 16mm and color but has most often been seen as a B&W 35mm blow-up. Something Weird Video's latest presentation still appears to be from 35mm—hence the softness—but it is at least in color, a fact that continually delights director Larry Buchanan in his first-ever audio commentary. Unfortunately, SWV's print includes that annoying, traveling black censorship bar that an exhibitor added to long shots of Hall strutting around in the buff, though the



more revealing swimming scenes are free of any such tampering. During Buchanan's informative talk (prompted by VW contributor Nathaniel Thompson), the director remembers the shooting ("eight to ten days... that's long for me—I'm kidding!"), the time he was offered the entire town of Luckenbach for \$50 (!), his hoodwinking of the Luckenbachians that he was making a film entitled *THE SINGING FESTIVAL*, and that Libby Hall was really "taped" and wore pasties in her nude scenes (if so, they were microscopic). **THE NAKED WITCH** "made more money than any of Alexander's other pictures combined," and for obvious reasons—the title alone would have filled any drive-in of the day. However, Buchanan remains charmingly naïve as to why the "simple country people" stayed put in their cars and never wandered over to the snack bar during the show. "I think people liked the charm of this picture... It had a sweetness to it."

In a perfect world, the second bill for this "Bewitching Double Feature" would have been, well, **THE NAKED WITCH** (1964), a lost Andy Milligan shocker that was eventually retitled **THE NAKED SEDUCTRESS** to avoid confusion with Buchanan's baby (for more on Milligan's film, see VW 52:37). Instead we get the obscure and quite terrible **CRYPT OF DARK SECRETS**, a lensed-in-Louisiana voodoo exploitationer with nary a crypt (or a script) in sight. The story is about a Vietnam vet named Ted Watkins (Ronald Tanet), who buys a house on a supposedly haunted island in the middle of a mossy bayou. When a trio of bumbling crooks learn that Ted keeps all

his retirement money in a bread box, they paddle out to "Haunted Isle" and conk the guy on the head, taking all his cash and leaving him for dead in the murky water. Fortunately, the whole sordid affair was witnessed from afar by Damballa (Maureen Ridley), a bayou spirit who can transform from a water snake into a sexy raven-haired woman in a burst of fog-machine mist. After dancing all nude and oily over Ted's prostrate form (the highlight of the film), Damballa restores Ted to a kind of living death, a condition that does nothing to alter Tanet's already dead performance. "I am going to tell you my story," she intones, and we segue to the same island, many centuries before, to witness Aztec Indians (played by Caucasians) burning Damballa on a pyre so that she may become the Oracle of the next 3,000 years. Meanwhile, the villains return to their shack, only to find the loot covered uncannily in blood. Funny how this doesn't deter them from taking a treasure map from a voodoo witch and returning to the bayou, where we get to watch them bicker and dig up an old chest in real-time, then drown when their boat sinks from the weight of too much gold (which we never get to see because, apparently, the prop budget ran out). Damballa leads Ted to the funeral pyre and they vanish in a puff of smoke, leaving the local police to silently ponder what the hell just happened.

Competently if unimaginatively shot (in other words, focus is good and the camera doesn't shake), this regional oddity is the work of New Orleans filmmaker Jack Weis, whose short list of directing

credits includes **QUADROON** (1972), a period drama about a sadistic plantation owner that anticipated the **MANDINGO** phenomenon by three years, and **MARDI GRAS MASSACRE** (1978), a sorry attempt to cash in on the slasher trend. With **CRYPT**, Weis benefits (like Buchanan before him) from the natural eeriness of his locations, a fairly good stock orchestral score, and an occasional astonishing visual in the form of the exotic Maureen Ridley. However, there is zero tension in the exceedingly childish screenplay, and the community theater actors are simply not capable of elevating the material above the amateur level. If every awkward pause between every line of dialogue was shortened, the running time would probably be shorn in half! Something Weird makes this potentially grueling experience as painless as possible with an amazingly sharp and colorful transfer (unmatted at 1.33:1), seemingly minted from a negative source.

For supplements, SWV has assembled a witch's pot of trailers, including **CRYPT OF DARK SECRETS** ("You pay for the whole seat, but you'll only use the edge!") **MACUMBA LOVE** with June "The Body" Wilkinson, Don Sharp's **WITCHCRAFT** (1964), starring Lon Chaney Jr., and **THE VIRGIN WITCH** (1970), a heavy-on-the-nudity British sex-horror film made in the same year as **THE VAMPIRE LOVERS** but appearing to be far less inhibited than Hammer's milestone. Short subjects include the usual strippers and burlesque dancers (Genii Young, Almita and Sandra) and an old B&W arcade loop titled "S'rehtom Cigam" ("Magic



Mother's" printed backwards) wherein a woman in a rubber crone mask rubs an oil lamp and, through the magic of a cutting camera, loses the mask and most of her clothes. After a little dance, she rubs the lamp again and her panties disappear: "Dne Eht!"

But the most perversely fascinating extra has to be **THE HOT PEARL SNATCH**, a completely mad 32m softcore-sex abridgement incorporating extensive Mardi Gras footage and starring the likes of Minnie the Mermaid, Darby Baby, and directed by Ren-Mart! While a stripper performs in a bar, an old man promises to tell us the incredible story of how he obtained a king's ransom in pearls;

but first he launches into a diatribe against "a merciless lesbian... with a hunger for pearls and girls!" which is all the excuse we need to we cut away to a buxom brunette posing for a butch lesbian painter. The two break out into some girl-on-girl action, climaxing with the brunette getting her body painted with flower patterns while the old coot babbles on the soundtrack: "They went back to the island to get the pearls... I followed them and we were captured by the natives... The lesbian was killed!" After a fleeting flashback in which he slits the throat of a topless "native" girl and is thusly cursed, the old man picks up a young woman and takes her back to

his motel for an exchange of pearls for sex. While they're getting it on, the camera cuts away to various people at the motel stripping and fondling while the old coot provides a running audio commentary ("There's a novel idea for a float!"). Then he goes nuts for some reason and strangles his lover with a pearl necklace. A naked blonde can't stand all the noise and calls the police, leading to the old man being gunned down when he emerges from his motel room! As he dies next to a discarded festival mask, a female voiceover reminds us: "Whoever... [film splice]... from our god will pay with his life!" Despite all the splices and the constant fireworks

*Maureen Ridley as Damballa, a bayou succubus who taunts and torments Vietnam vet Ronald Tanet in CRYPT OF DARK SECRETS.*







Prior to becoming a celebrated director, Juzo Itami starred as a decadent nobleman in *THE NOTORIOUS CONCUBINES*, Shochiku's adaptation of a scandalous Chinese erotic novel.

display of vertical scratches, **THE HOT PEARL SNATCH** looks better than most SWV extras, boasting fine resolution, rich color and rock solid blacks. Die-hard collectors/masochists will be relieved to know that SWV offers the complete feature (50m 16s) on VHS for \$20 ppd.

Extras are rounded out by a nice gallery of publicity and behind-the-scenes stills from **THE NAKED WITCH**, plus a collection of lurid 1970s comic magazine covers that is different from the one that graced SWV's **BLOOD FREAK** DVD. Three Easter eggs are accessible through the magic of your remote wand's left-arrow button, including a hilarious trailer for **BEAUTY AND THE CAVE**, starring Libby Hall (billed as Libby Booth). "Clothed only in her self," Libby gives an encore performance as yet another siren that swims beneath a waterfall and puts the love hex on a dim-witted male. "Filmed for the giant screen in the splendor of Eastmancolor, it will hold you spellbound and haunt your dreams forever!"

## THE NOTORIOUS CONCUBINES

*Kin Pei Bei*

aka **THE CONCUBINES, FIST & STEEL—THE CONCUBINES**

1969, *Something Weird Video*, DD-1.0/16:9/LB/+, \$19.99, 78m 35s, DVD-1

By John Charles

Director Koji Wakamatsu is admired for such startling underground productions as **GO, GO SECOND TIME VIRGIN** and **ECSTASY OF THE ANGELS**, both of which were reviewed by Richard Harland Smith in VW 73:62. However, he occasionally worked on more mainstream projects like this Shochiku adaptation of the scandalous Chinese erotic novel *JIN PING MEI*, the content of which is potent enough for the book to remain banned in China to this day. Pan Jin-lien (Tomoko Mayama), the beautiful, scheming wife of rice seller Wu Ta (Hatsuo Yamatani), has an affair but is forgiven this transgression by her obsequious husband. The woman quickly gives in to temptation and poisons Ta, but fears what the man's brother, soldier

Wu Sung (Shikokyu Takashima), might do upon returning to the region. Sure enough, upon seeing his brother's spirit tablet, Sung goes berserk, commits murder, and is sentenced to death. In the meantime, Jin-lien has become the fifth wife of decadent Hsi Men-ching (future director Juzo Itami) but is soon forgotten by the drinking, carousing nobleman. Jin-lien has a hostile relationship with her fellow concubines and, when Men-ching marries a sixth time and fathers a son with his new bride, Jin-lien murders the baby. Men-ching drowns his sorrows in wine and sex, but he has worse problems ahead: Wu Sung has escaped execution and is leading a group of murderous bandits into the territory.

**THE NOTORIOUS CONCUBINES** was released stateside by Harry Novak's Boxoffice International minus—obviously—the original language track and almost all of its credits, and that is the version presented here. (The Novak edition was also most likely edited, but we were unable to locate the original Japanese



running time.) Alas, these alterations have largely negated whatever merits the original version possessed. The English dialogue by actor/writer James E. McLarty (**THE TOUCH OF SATAN**) is simplistic and the dubbing is incredibly lackadaisical, draining the energy and tension from scene after scene. The mix is also quite thin, with background foley effects and ambient sounds largely non-existent, adding to the artificiality of it all. We are left with a plodding and muddled narrative that fails to hold one's interest and central characters who make virtually no impression at all. It does not help that the source novel spans 70 chapters (the title, *JIN PING MEI*, reflects the names of three concubines but only Jin gets center stage here), so we are left with a fragment of a story fragment. The production's visual merits, at least, remain intact. While based on a classic of Chinese literature, this is very much a Japanese film in both its compositions and production design, though even this novelty eventually fails to hold one's attention. In true exploitation style, the jacket copy claims that the movie is "awash in sex, violence, and brutality," but the eroticism is fairly mild, with some innocuous nudity and a couple of brief whippings, and bloodshed is reserved by Japanese standards of the time. What initially seem to be brief flaws in the print are actually instances of optical blurring added to obscure pubic hair, a bit of censorship performed in the movie's home territory and certainly not the work of Harry Novak!

While it is nice to see that SWV is now doing selected titles in 16:9, the 2.36:1 presentation here is uneven, with the image often on the soft and grainy side.

The transfer is also a bit too dark, with indistinct contrasts during some low light sequences. Colors are strong, however, and the source materials (apparently a 35mm positive) are generally clean, with the most prominent wear subsiding after the first few minutes. Aside from being a bit low, the audio has no notable problems than were likely already present. On a trivial note, **THE NOTORIOUS CONCUBINES** is one of the few Boxoffice International sex films to be released with an official MPAA "R" rating, as opposed to Novak's phony "Restricted Admission" tag.

As usual with Something Weird discs, the extras are legion, including an entire second feature mentioned only on the back of the keep case. After spending part of the '30s directing Sylvia Sidney movies for Paramount, Russian-born director Marion Gering's career went off in unusual directions, none more so than **VIOLATED PARADISE** (1963; 66m 35s), aka **THE SCINTILLATING SIN**. Ostensibly an adaption of Fosco Maraini's book *MEETING WITH JAPAN*, this moderately interesting Italian/Japanese co-production begins with a NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC-style look at local traditions, seen through the eyes of pretty teenager Tamako (Kazuko Mine, voiced by Paulette Girard with *faux* Japanese accent), who lives in a remote settlement but decides to become a geisha in Tokyo. We start with the rural villages (where topless fishergirls harvest *awabi*) and then receive a primer in Shinto and Buddhism. Once Tamako arrives in the big city, the movie veers into *mondo* territory, alternating between her delicate observations about life and the citizenry, and a condescending male narrator's

snide asides that try to paint the Japanese as the most hedonistic race on the planet ("This is what happens when the moon is out and Tokyo entertains itself and the men have good expense accounts"). Along the way, we learn about the training and demands made upon those who practice the traditional geisha arts, girls who perform in cabarets, public baths, etc. There is enough casual nudity here to have satisfied early '60s drive-in patrons in search of the exotic Eastern erotic escapism (though certainly none of the roughie content inherent in that typically misleading title), but contemporary viewers will find the movie's time capsule views of the country its most significant quality.

The print suffers from scratches and constant speckling. There are also dialogue-dropping splices (particularly during a badly worn reel midway through) and occasional wobbling caused by damaged sprockets. The Eastman Color hues are still strong, but some greenish discoloration pops up from time-to-time and color quality drops considerably in the final reel. The standard framing does not seem to compromise the compositions in any way and the sound is reasonable, considering how well-travelled the element is. In contrast to previous discs, the SWV bug does not appear and, when one views the movie as a free bonus (not to mention one that is more interesting than the main feature), the presentation is acceptable.

Additional supplements include trailers for **NOTORIOUS** (which carries the title **THE CONCUBINES**, also the name on the source used for the transfer) and five other Asian erotic films that played domestic venues: **BONELESS**, **GEISHA PLAYMATES**



("Filmed entirely in Japan in the fleshpots of Tokyo!"), **NAKED PURSUIT** ("A film as shocking as the heritage of violence that made it possible!"), **THE SLAVE WIDOW**, and **THE WEIRD LOVE-MAKERS**. Five short subjects are also included. Of most interest are the two from Japan, both of which are in color and scope. "Red Lights of Tokyo" (2.40:1, 16m 14s) features a variety of acts, while the more leering of the two, "Sherbet Nude" (2.38:1, 18m 15s) unfolds in such stylized backgrounds as an apartment and office building. The others are American-made, B&W, Academy ratio, and not nearly as stylish. "Lotus Wing—Oriental Typhoon" (3m 22s) apparently dates from the early '50s, while "Princess Ming Chu" (4m 58s) looks to be an excerpt from the same era. Finally, there is "Oriental Tease" (17m 51s), a multi-segment coin-drop arcade loop from 1949 that entreats the viewer to part with his cash via title cards like "Part Four has passed but don't feel blue—Part Five is better I'm telling you!"

## RAIDERS OF THE LIVING DEAD

1986, Image Entertainment, DD-2.0/MA/+, \$24.99, 85m 26s, DVD-1

By Shane M. Dallmann

Back in VW 59:24, John Charles reviewed the budget VHS release of this rare directorial effort from Independent-International's prolific producer/distributor Samuel L. Sherman. At the time, he observed that **RAIDERS OF THE LIVING DEAD**, in addition to other peculiarities, showed telltale signs of having been derived from the work of more than one director. As anyone at all familiar with I-I might suspect, there's quite a story



*This Fulci-esque zombie is only one of the many who are raided in Sam Sherman's RAIDERS OF THE LIVING DEAD.*

behind this production—and the first published account comes courtesy of the same John Charles, who provided the liner notes accompanying this double-disc Region 1 DVD set from Image Entertainment! It scarcely matters that Charles' original review was a negative one: as demonstrated by Image's six-disc "Blood Collection," such stories and supplemental materials as can only be provided by Sam Sherman are capable of transforming some most unlikely titles into some most welcome discs. And while **RAIDERS** doesn't come with the built-in fan following that the "Blood" titles did, anyone who found those releases at all compelling will

likely be interested in checking it out—and they'll know it's out there, too, as it was cannily promoted on every one of them!

**RAIDERS OF THE LIVING DEAD** rates two discs because it's presented in no less than *three* separate versions. Its earliest incarnation (found on Disc 2 of this set) was **DYING DAY**, an approximately hour-long tale of the supernatural created in 1983 by low-budget independent filmmaker Brett Piper (whose later **DARK FORTRESS** would be reworked by Troma as **A NYMPHOID BARBARIAN IN DINOSAUR HELL**, and whose recent **DRAINIA** can be found on the shelves of major chain stores). In brief, Robert Deveau played Morgan



Randall, the last in the line of a cursed family, the males of which were all relentlessly hunted down and killed by zombies resurrected and controlled by a mysterious "Man in Black" (Bob Sacchetti). The story involves Randall's preparation for his final showdown with the undead and their master; the history of the curse (which involved slave abuse on a Cuban sugar plantation); and the assistance provided to Randall by Shelley Godwin (Donna Asali), a nurse he meets (literally by accident) during his ordeal.

**DYING DAY** caught the eye of a buyer at Independent-International—but the purchased film sat around for some considerable time before anyone realized that it fell short of feature-length. Agreeing to live up to his promise of a full-length feature film, Piper shot approximately 20m worth of material to tack onto the beginning of the film, free of charge. But this footage, depicting two of Randall's ancestors (one in 1897, one in 1936) being dispatched by zombies, did nothing to help; apart from its horrendous quality, its use of nudity restricted its utility for television—which, at the time, was what Sherman had in mind for the project.

Image's disc presents **DYING DAY** in its expanded (80m 7s) version. The lack of sound during the lengthy (animated) opening credits, coupled with the quality of the flashback footage (every bit as awful as Sherman suggests it is) may prevent many viewers from even getting to the film proper (signaled by the intrusion of an extra video-generated title card that announces I-I's copyright), but those who do will see what attracted the company to Piper's work to begin

with. While admittedly not a marketable feature, it's certainly nothing for a beginning filmmaker to be ashamed of, either.

The film's second distinct incarnation (which shares Disc 1 with the final version) was **DARK NIGHT**, Sam Sherman's own first re-working of Piper's original (it was easier and less expensive for Sherman to do it himself rather than bring house director Al Adamson in from the West Coast), for which he retrieved cast members Deveau, Asali and Sacchetti. In addition, Sherman recruited veteran Western actor Bob Allen and personal friend Zita Johann (best known as Boris Karloff's love interest in 1932's **THE MUMMY**). **DARK NIGHT** jettisoned all of Piper's new prologue footage and shifted the climax from a deserted warehouse to a more expansive setting—that of Rockmoor Island and its abandoned prison. Randall is now a reporter investigating "grave" activity, while the Man in Black is now the semi-undead son of Dr. Carstairs (Allen), a practitioner of experiments similar to those carried out in Peter Newbrook's **THE ASPHYX** (1972). The history of Carstairs' activities, which mostly took place at the aforementioned prison, replaces the Cuban backstory, though much of that flashback imagery is retained in a nightmare sequence. Johann appears as a librarian that provides Randall with helpful information late in the film, and extra local color was provided via extensive footage of the Halloween festivities at Greenwich Village.

**DARK NIGHT** (72m 11s) exists in rough workprint form only. Though it, too, is copyrighted by Independent-International, Sherman never completed work

on this variant; he found parts of it lacking (including some of his own work), and he was especially unhappy with Allen's status as a villain. The interested viewer may just wish to view Allen's scenes and perhaps the Greenwich Village footage in this version, as this material can't be viewed elsewhere; but the workprint quality and the considerable absence of sound (which extends to the entire climax) makes this variant an especially difficult slog.

Finally, Sherman decided to give the project a complete overhaul. Even more footage with Deveau and Asali was shot. Sacchetti was retained, but his character became a mute. Johann's **DARK NIGHT** cameo was kept in its entirety—and Bob Allen also returned, but as an entirely new (and unquestionably good) character—the kindly grandfather of Scott Schwarz, the new, teenaged hero of what would now be known as **RAIDERS OF THE LIVING DEAD**. Despite receiving an MPAA rating, the film never played American theaters; it made its debut on an episode of the USA Network's late, lamented "Saturday Nightmares" creature feature series. However, yet another of Sherman's unusual investments paid off handsomely—**RAIDERS** proved quite popular in various foreign markets. Disc 1 of this set presents the feature just as it played in the tape release previously reviewed (with standard framing and Dolby Digital two-channel mono sound)—only now it comes with Sam Sherman's definitive, "set the record straight" commentary, which runs the full length of the film. Sherman feels entitled to the director's credit (Brett Piper is now credited with "Inceptive Effects & Direction") on a work that



he estimates was 80% his at that point, but now that all the footage ever shot for the project is available for inspection, he figures that somebody or other is going to get out a stopwatch and time the footage exactly "...probably for VIDEO WATCHDOG!"

While such extremes weren't deemed necessary by this writer, Sherman is essentially correct. The **RAIDERS** footage that can be traced all the way back to **DYING DAY** includes (most importantly): Randall's use of a fire-trap against a pursuing zombie; his meeting with Shelley; his "damn liberals" conversation with antique (and gun) dealer "William Pratt;" Sacchetti's zombie resurrection (which occurs at a different point in all three versions); and Randall's knife-and-shotgun battle against a zombie invader (including the exploding head effect that makes the film's PG-13 rating and supposed "family-friendly" bent a little surprising). Also retained is a sequence set in a movie theater: while Sherman's addition of footage from the Three Stooges short **DISORDER IN THE COURT** may seem like padding, he opines that the audience should see what the characters are watching (and for that matter, the soundtrack of that very short can be heard at that point in **DYING DAY**). Plenty of other details await the listener: among other things, we learn that potential audio problems on a noisy street were solved by the same sound mixer who did the honors for **ANNIE HALL**; that Scott Schwarz requested—and was granted—a chance to direct one shot towards the end of the film; and that the "ray gun" effects were scratched onto the film's surface

out of necessity when an overseas distributor needed a print right away. (It certainly wasn't because I-I didn't know how to do such effects; Sherman directs those who seek proof to the **EXORCISM AT MIDNIGHT** DVD!) Said effects were carried out by I-I's resident title designer—now referred to as "the late Bob LeBar." And speaking of "scratching the surface," this review has scarcely done that as regards the anecdotes related on this track.

**RAIDERS** and **DYING DAY** each score twelve chapters on the menu—**DARK NIGHT** receives nine. The remaining extras (back to Disc 2) consist of a still gallery (3m 32s) in which we get to see some amusing photos (described in the commentary) of Sherman demonstrating the proper "zombie walk" for his extras, among other behind-the-scenes glimpses; and the complete "Blood Collection" trailer lineup (including the "House of Terror" spook show promo). In a huge disappointment, the previous announcement that this disc would also contain Sherman's celebrated student film **THE WEIRD STRANGER** turned out to be premature. Fans are still waiting to see this elusive work, which had to be dropped due to copyright clearance issues. As for **RAIDERS**? Sherman allows that he may have "ruined" a Gothic masterpiece in the eyes of some fans—but while he certainly has nothing against Brett Piper (who was understandably baffled at what **DYING DAY** became), he stands behind every business decision he made. The choice is up to you—and on these two discs, you'll find (literally) everything you need to make it.

## SAVAGE ABDUCTION

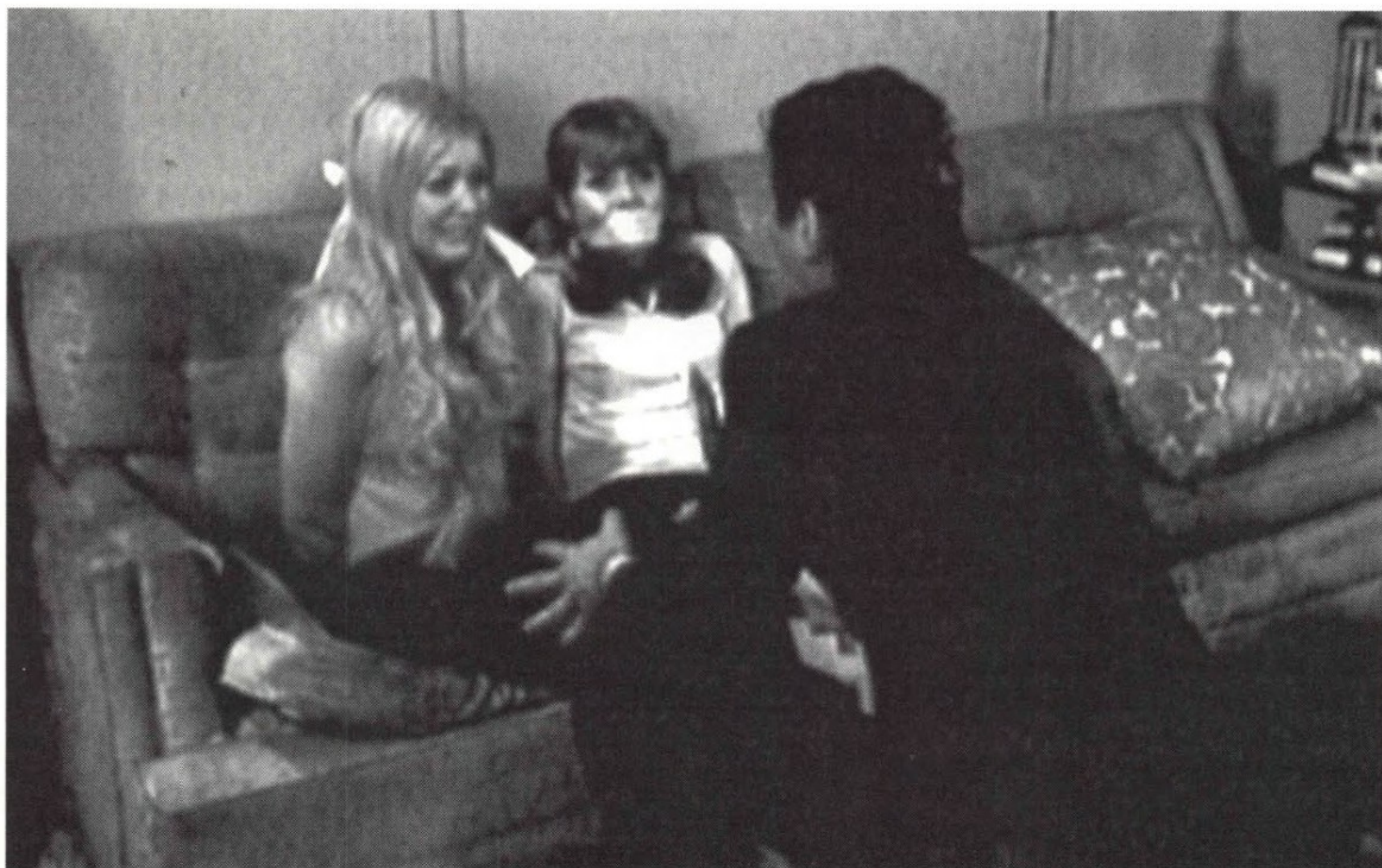
aka **CYCLE PSYCHO**,  
**NUMBERED DAYS**

1972, Troma Team Video, DD-1.0/+,  
\$19.95, 79m 52s, DVD-0

By Tim Lucas

Between assignments for Stanley Kubrick, Joe Turkel (**PATHS OF GLORY**, **THE SHINING**) starred in this low-rent exploitation shocker, which was written, produced and directed by **INCREDIBLE TWO-HEADED TRANSPLANT** scribe John Lawrence. After being hired to murder the wife of successful Los Angeles attorney Dick Rideland (Tom Drake), twitchy, Oedipally deranged Harvey (Turkel) discovers that it's more fun to have sex with dead women than to stab mannikins under the watchful stare of Mother's portrait. He proceeds to blackmail Rideland, threatening to expose him with tape recordings of their business agreement unless he furnishes his ultimate fantasy of having two live girls to murder simultaneously. Rideland turns the job over to one of his clients, Chelsea Miller (**WEREWOLVES ON WHEELS**' Stephen Oliver), president of the Savage Disciples biker gang. Needing the money ("Ten thou? Man, we could live forever on that!"), mostly to buy grass for a biker mama (Amy Thomson) in serious need of mellowing out, Chelsea passes the buck to underlings Irish (Bill Barney) and Romeo (Sean Kenney), who abduct two fresh-from-Omaha teens, Jenny (Tanis Gallik) and Faye (**GRAVE OF THE VAMPIRE**'s Kitty Vallacher), just seconds after they gush, "Wow, I can't believe we're really in Hollywood!" As Harvey packs a suitcase with hacksaws and leakproof bags in dewy anticipation of his double





*Two innocent teens (Tanis Gallik and Kitty Vallacher) are kidnapped by a biker gang for the twisted amusement of sicko Joe Turkel in SAVAGE ABDUCTION.*

date, the Savage Disciples amuse themselves with their temporary property—but will Romeo's developing attraction to Jenny throw a spanner in the works?

Evidently shot in 16mm, **SAVAGE ABDUCTION** is not much more than average exploitation fodder, but it manages to sustain interest on the promise of lines it might, but never really does, cross. Without nudity, without f-words, and with a minimum of bloodshed (did I just hear thousands of wallets closing?), it fosters a general atmosphere of danger by virtue of mostly earnest performances, a general humorlessness, and regular, off-putting allusions to various ugly deeds (necrophilia, rape, dismemberment). What is most interesting about the film in hindsight is its diagrammatical "food chain" depiction of how a Page 3 crime of its day might be committed, with the innocent

randomly preyed upon by errant working class types, acting on behalf of their executive class legal counsel, to satiate the sick needs of a murderer who isn't man enough to secure his own prey, but bold enough to have an agent of the law under his thumb. Stafford Repp (BATMAN's Chief O'Hara), sporting longer hair than you might expect, turns up in a small supporting role, and the portrait of Mother that reduces Turkel to a twitching mess appears to be a painting of actress Ruth McDevitt that was acquired on the cheap from another production. The score includes two lame originals ("On the Edge of a Moment" and "Rollin'") by former AIP songsmiths Jerry Styner and Guy Hemrick, performed by the band Salt Lick.

Packaged with art and hyperbole that it never comes close to repaying in kind ("Compared to Wes Craven's **LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT** and **I SPIT ON**

**YOUR GRAVE** for its brutal and harrowing depiction of the dark side of man, **SAVAGE ABDUCTION** is an unforgettable shocker that stays permanently embedded in the viewer's mind"), **SAVAGE ABDUCTION** comes to DVD in a transfer indistinguishable from a 1970s local TV broadcast. Darkish, unattractive, with verging-on-solarizing blacks, it's not a pretty presentation, but an adequate one; if anything, the cheap, take-it-or-leave-it look of the disc preserves an aspect of the movie's grindhouse heritage and aspirations. The center-channelled audio is likewise unexceptional but acceptable. Less so is the provision of only six chapter marks for the entire feature, and the fact that our copy repeatedly reverted to menu at the end of Chapter 1. The movie is introduced by Lloyd Kaufman and a buxom blonde in a tube top, and trailers for other Troma-produced releases are included.



## THE SINGING DETECTIVE

1986, BBC Video/Warner Home Video, DD-2.0/MA/CC, \$59.98, approximately 7 hours, DVD-1

By Kim Newman

Dennis Potter wrote novels and screenplays (**GORKY PARK**), but was one of the few major writers to channel the greatest part of his creativity into television. As a specialist in one-off, studio-based drama (a form that persisted into the 1980s in the UK), Potter was often called a "TV playwright," while Stephen King has taken to using the expression "novel for television" to describe a miniseries not based on pre-existing material, the category into which **THE SINGING DETECTIVE** falls. How lowly the medium is esteemed is expressed by the fact there isn't even a specific term for a genuine artist working in it that doesn't make aspirational associations with more prestigious art forms.

**THE SINGING DETECTIVE**, with its nearly seven-hour running time, demonstrates the depth, complexity, daring, range, emotional power and reach possible but rarely even attempted by a longform TV serial. Seventeen years on, the most surreal thing about the piece is that it was broadcast by the BBC's most populist channel in peak viewing time and, partly thanks to press complaints about its supposed obscenity, pulled in spectacular audience figures. Imagine NBC or Fox devoting primetime during sweeps week to the most demanding films of Alain Resnais (whose **PROVIDENCE** must have been an influence) or the early Nicolas Roeg (Roeg and Potter worked together on a minor film, **TRACK 29**)! Without Potter, **TWIN PEAKS** would have

been as unthinkable on American TV as **MULHOLLAND DR.** turned out to be and **THE SOPRANOS** or **SIX FEET UNDER** wouldn't have the nerve to include fantastical elements that expose characters who are at once human and monstrous. On a more banal level, there would never have been a **COP ROCK**, the wilder stretches of **MOONLIGHTING** or musical episodes of **CHICAGO HOPE**, **THE SIMPSONS** and **BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER**. Even the "rubber reality" likes of **DARK CITY**, **EXISTENZ** and **DONNIE DARKO** lift hat-and-trenchcoated elements from Potter's multiple lives of Philip Marlow. Intriguingly, David Cronenberg was at one time attached to Potter's screenplay for an Americanised remake, which has recently come to the screen under the direction of Keith Gordon.

The serial consists of six episodes: "Skin" (68m 27s), "Heat" (69m 4s), "Lovely Days" (63m), "Clues" (67m 22s), "Pitter Patter" (58m 15s) and "Who Done It" (77m 13s), which weave a web of interlocking realities in the service of an exploration of the life and mind of its protagonist. Marlow (**THE COOK THE THIEF HIS WIFE & HER LOVER**'s Michael Gambon) lies in a hospital bed suffering from psoriatic arthropathy, a severe condition (which Potter famously also endured) affecting his skin and his joints. A splenetic, self-pitying, viciously articulate lout who suffers from an extreme disgust not only for his own diseased body but for all flesh, Marlow was once a writer of detective stories. As he endures treatments which eventually alleviate his illness, Marlow reimagines his earlier mystery novel, **THE SINGING DETECTIVE**, set just after WWII. In this thread

of drama, a crooning shamus also named Philip Marlow (Gambon again) is hired by shady character Mark Binney (**FORTRESS 2: RE-ENTRY**'s Patrick Malahide) to investigate the death of an ambiguous Russian prostitute found in the Thames and involved with a lean-and-gross team of gun-toting mystery men (Ron Peck, George Rossi). Interleaved with this *noir*-shot story and the medical soap/sit-com of the hospital ward are flashbacks to Marlow's rural childhood towards the end of the war, in which he learns about betrayal and sexuality as his mother (Alison Steadman) is seduced by the best friend (Malahide again) of his sad-eyed father (Jim Carter), leading to a spell in wartime London and terrible events he later filters into his novel. "You don't know writers," Marlow tells his hospital psychotherapist (Bill Paterson), "they'll use anything and anybody, they'll eat their own young."

Meanwhile, the little Philip (Lyndon Davies) commits his own hideous schoolroom betrayal, prompting another lifelong guilt, and the adult writer imagines his estranged wife Nicola (Janet Suzman) isn't trying to reconcile with him but is plotting with another snake-like incarnation of the Malahide character, named "Mark Finney," to rob him of a screenplay. The connective tissue between the various layers of reality, memory, imagination and art is the music of the 1940s. On first broadcast, **THE SINGING DETECTIVE** was seen as a follow-up to Potter's very successful earlier serial **PENNIES FROM HEAVEN**, which made use of the pop standards of the 1930s and





*Michael Gambon stars in Dennis Potter's memorable BBC miniseries, **THE SINGING DETECTIVE**.*

introduced the technique of miming to pre-existing recordings to set up ironic counterpoints that became a Potter trademark (see Herbert Ross' Hollywood film adaptation, **PENNIES FROM HEAVEN**) and fed into the work of David Lynch via the "In Dreams" sequence of **BLUE VELVET**. Though this device is used throughout **THE SINGING DETECTIVE**—as it is in Potter's later 1950s-set **LIPSTICK ON YOUR COLLAR**—the effect is slightly different. Here, the songs prompt a few big **PENNIES FROM HEAVEN**-style musical numbers in which doctors and patients become singing dancing extras (notably the startling "Dem Bones" in "Skin") but are mainly sourced to Marlow's fantasy self-image as the Singing Detective, a Chandler-spieling smoothie who can

simultaneously warble "Any Umbrellas" and dodge a bullet. Since the hero's state of mind is influenced by his psychological and physical scarrings, his disease and a drugs cocktail, the music becomes one of many symptoms of his situation as opposed to the all-overpowering metaphor of **PENNIES FROM HEAVEN**.

It's a huge work, with an astonishing range of approaches, from broad comedy (a medical procedure involving grease and pretty nurse Joanne Whalley is very well-remembered) to absolute tragedy (it takes five episodes even to confront which death has so shattered Philip) with even a moment of nightmarish horror featuring a living, singing scarecrow in "Who Done It." Potter may be its visionary creator, but there's no denying he was served

here by the strongest collaborators he would ever have, including in Jon Amiel (**THE CORE**) a rare director who could persuade him to rewrite and improve his first draft and sought to add his own layers to an already-rich piece. It has been said that Potter, who eventually came to direct his own scripts (notably the not-much-liked **BLACK EYES**), limited the effectiveness of his own work by regarding collaborators as hired hands at best and nuisances at worst. Here, Amiel is responsible for truly extraordinary television, confidently shuffling the elements so that a complex piece is never confusing. Gambon, cast after Nicol Williamson turned the role down, graduated from solid pro to powerhouse character star with his Marlow. The level Gambon adds, unlike



Michael Gough (BLACKEYES) or Albert Finney (KARAOKE), is that he takes the authorial stand-in character (Potter always claimed his work was personal but *not* autobiographical) and revels in his many entertaining bitter-nesses while also revealing a heartbreaking wounded sensitiv-ity that makes him worth our at-tention. No matter how many unforgiveable things Marlow might say to those around him, he remains someone the viewer has no choice but to love and feel complicit with.

The BBC's three-disc DVD, available as a US R1 release (with a UK R2 edition presumably due in the future), is a solid presen-tation of material so outstand-ing that it seems like a towering work of genius even on dupey video dub. There has been some anal retentive complaint about the DVD transfer, but it should be remembered that this was shot on 16mm (much of Potter's earlier work was on tape); the grain in the picture is simply how it looks. Though the image might seem soft in comparison with work originated for theatrical ex-hibition or even more recent tele-vision, it shows a wealth of detail and a variance in visual styles (the "fictional" scenes are won-derful pastiche, with astonish-ingly effective use of library mysterioso tracks). A word of advice for newcomers: though so engaging and potent it's hard not to watch the whole thing at once, it plays well in installments and each episode seamlessly incor-porates its own "previously..." story-so-far summations, though never through simple repetition.

Producer Kenneth Trodd (who worked with Potter through-out his career) and Amiel provide a fascinating commentary which might seem a little sparse—both

are so respectful of the piece that they sometimes don't like to talk over especially wonderful bits of invective or performance—but nevertheless keeps up through-out the whole serial, providing pertinent background informa-tion and insights into the unique processes (sadly unrepeatable) whereby such challenging work made it to the small screen. They do get tired enough by the sixth episode to mix up Agatha Christie with Margery Allingham in talking about a scene that name-checks THE MURDER OF ROGER ACKROYD. A third disc has a smattering of useful extras: a picture gallery, two extracts from POINTS OF VIEW (a long-running UK TV institution which simply consists of viewers' letters read out and reacted to), a 9m interview with Potter specifically talking about THE SINGING DE-TECTIVE, and CLOSE-UP: DENNIS POTTER (39m 34s), a 1998 docu-mentary that covers most of Potter's career and gives a lot of revealing background material about his personal life and its relationship with his work. Sadly missing (because it was made for a rival TV station?) is Potter's fi-nal interview, given when he knew he was dying of cancer; one hopes that more of his back cata-logue will become available and that it sneaks its way on as an extra for something else.

## WANTED FOR MURDER

aka **VOICE IN THE NIGHT**

1946, All Day Entertainment, DD-2.0/+, \$24.99, 101m 49s, DVD-0  
By John Charles

A mechanical breakdown on the subway gives bus conductor Jack (Derek Farr) the perfect opportunity to chat up pretty record shop employee Anne (**MINE OWN EXECUTIONER's**

Dulcie Gray), who is headed to the Hampstead Heath fair to meet her boyfriend, debonair businessman Victor Colebrooke (**A CANTERBURY TALE's** Eric Portman). Arriving an hour late, the two prepare to ride the merry-go-round when Anne spies an aggravated Victor, who insists that they leave the place imme-diately. A woman is found strangled shortly thereafter, the sixth in a series of grisly slayings that have left New Scotland Yard baffled. Chief Inspector Conway (**DEAD OF NIGHT's** Roland Cul-ver) suspects Victor but has little more than intuition to back up his hunch. However, clues slowly begin to surface and Conway is inadvertently aided by Cole-brooke himself. Tormented by the memory of his father (a Vic-torian executioner known as "The Happy Hangman," whose grue-some exploits rate an exhibit at Madame Tussaud's Wax Mu-seum), Victor is compelled to strangle women and prowls the streets by night. When Anne falls in love with Jack, she decides to break off with Victor and prom-ises to meet with him one last time, unknowingly putting her-self in mortal danger.

Released stateside by 20th Century Fox, this British offering (adapted from a stageplay by co-writer Emeric Pressburger) is an effective merging of *film noir* and British police procedural ele-ments. In a memorable touch, Colebrooke is obsessed with a particular piece of music called "Voice in the Night" and it is used throughout the film to signify those instances when he is start-ing to go around the bend, nicely compounding the irrational thoughts and actions the man exhibits during these moments. Portman impresses in the role, particularly during a sequence



where Conway calls Colebrooke into his office so that the latter will be exposed to a young couple who noticed him at the scene of his latest killing. Already convinced that the man is guilty but lacking sufficient evidence to press charges, Conway makes careful note of Colebrooke's reactions to the situation. As the noose slowly begins to tighten, the suspect's demeanour gradually changes from nonchalant to apprehensive to mildly hostile. It is a very effective bit of acting and a gripping sequence, well handled by director Lawrence Huntington (**THE VULTURE**). All Day's jacket copy points out that the film presages **STRANGERS ON A TRAIN** (1951) and this can be seen in the setting of one murder, the lead-in to a possible second killing, and the character quirks of the villain and his overprotective mother. The parallels are never distinctive enough,

however, to say for certain whether Alfred Hitchcock may have seen the original stageplay (co-written by Percy Robinson and Terence DeMarnay) or the feature and intentionally emulated one or both. Barbara Everest (as Victor's concerned mother), Stanley Holloway, and Kathleen Harrison (**A CHRISTMAS CAROL**) co-star, and Wilfred Hyde-White has a memorable bit as a guide in *The Chamber of Horrors*.

This entry in All Day's "Pulp Cinema" series is reportedly derived from the archival 35mm B&W negative and, judging from the condition of this element's opening minutes, the transfer was performed just in time. Two of the original title cards have been altered (one with a "Raymond Rohauer presents" added and the other now attributing a 1982 copyright to The Rohauer Collection), indicating

that an American source was utilized for this sequence at least. After the credits conclude, the picture and sound degrade considerably, corrupted by chemical deterioration that causes blacks to flicker and whites to become very dull and greyish, making the actors' faces look quite ghastly. This instability also induces some pronounced background artifacting, and the audio is tinny and hissy. From Reel 2 onwards, the image and sound are much more palatable, with only light speckling detracting slightly from the experience. The audio is mildly distorted at times but this seems due mainly to the limitations of the original recording, not a fault of preservation. Extras consist of the American trailer (dominated by onscreen hyperbole and hardsell narration) and a still gallery. The DVD has no time coding and was authored by Atlantic Media Productions.

*New Scotland Yard inspector Roland Culver (right) tries to trip up serial strangler Eric Portman in the British thriller WANTED FOR MURDER.*





## Imports

### THE QUATERMASS XPERIMENT

1955, DD Video, DD-2.0/MA/+,  
£15.99, 78m 24s, DVD-0 (PAL)  
By Kim Newman

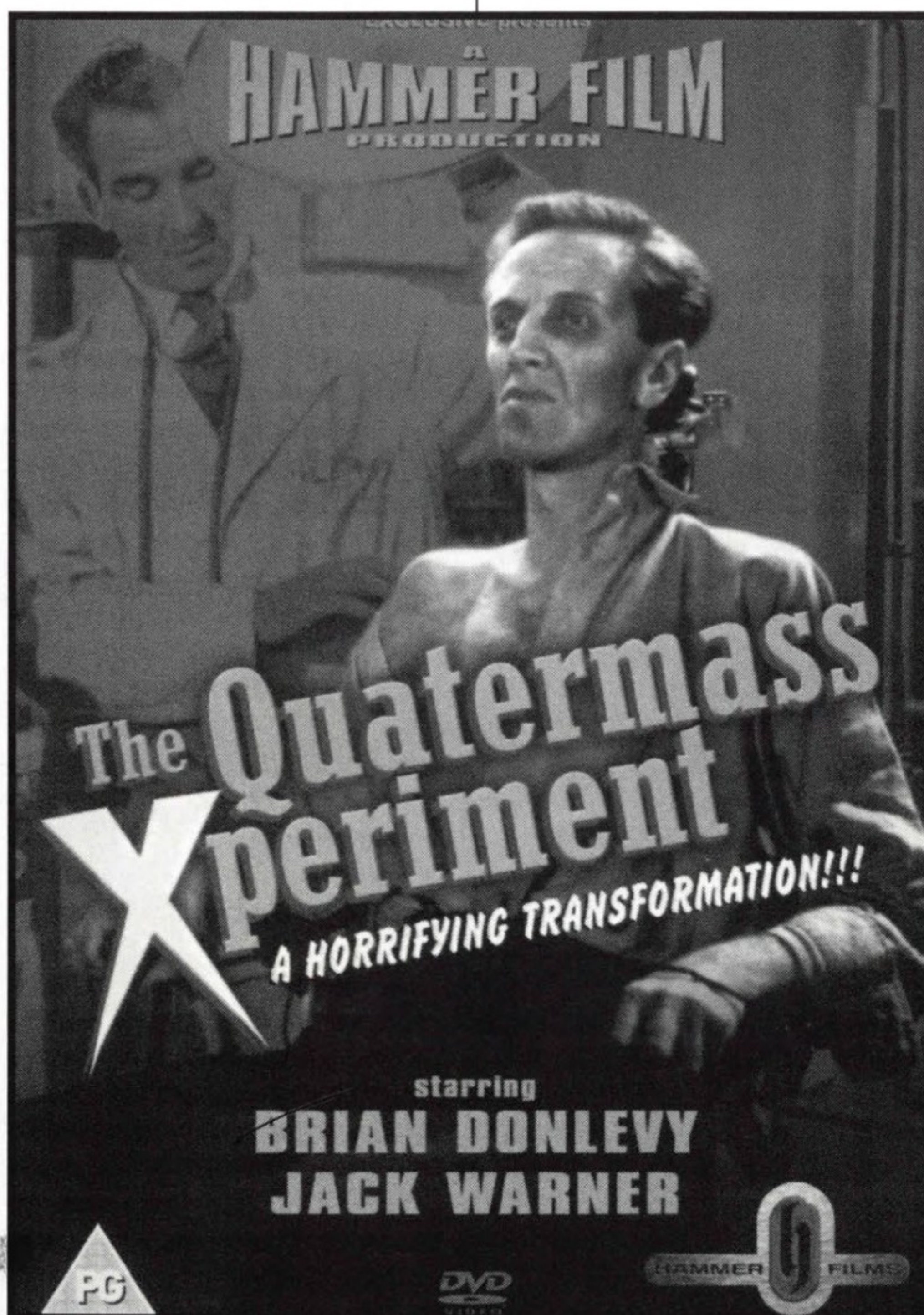
Our most detailed look at this cornerstone was way back in VW 12, when Tim Lucas compared video releases of the UK cut of **THE QUATERMASS XPERIMENT** and the US **THE CREEPING UNKNOWN** and Stephen R. Bissette examined the differences between Val Guest's film and the 1953 BBC-TV serial by Nigel Kneale. Subsequently, we noted a further video release [VW 38:14] and a laserdisc which was part of the **UNITED ARTISTS SCI-FI MATINEE VOLUME 2** [VW 42:63].

Now **THE QUATERMASS XPERIMENT** makes its DVD debut as a UK Region 2 disc from DD Video, who have several other Hammer titles on their lists, including releases of **QUATERMASS 2**, **THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN** and **X THE UNKNOWN**, all substantially identical to the US Region 1 releases from Anchor Bay. Given that the film exists in a surprising number of versions, it should be noted that the print bears the onscreen title **THE QUATERMASS XPERIMENT** (since the original "X"-certificate release, TV showings have more commonly opted for **EXPERIMENT**). Fully present are the sometimes-snipped bits of business noted by Tim Lucas and correspondent Glenn Erickson [VW 38:14], ranging from the horrific (the dead faces of the private eye and the chemist), through character building (Jack Warner's fussing with an electric razor) to the atmospheric (the cheery zoo-keeper about to get a nasty surprise). That it has approximately the same running time as the

trimmed US release is a PAL film/video conversion issue. Aptly, for a film that devotes a scene to a film technician fussing over the need to produce a perfect print from the battered film shot aboard the spaceship, the standard frame transfer is smashing, reproducing the blacks, whites and greys so perfectly that it's possible to spot the differences between first-unit, second-unit and stock shots.

**THE QUATERMASS XPERIMENT** now joins DVD editions of Hammer's other Quatermass films and UK-only releases of the BBC's **QUATERMASS AND THE PIT** (the whole serial edited together under

Kneale's supervision) and a double-disc set of the 1979 four-hour serial **QUATERMASS** and its feature-length condensation, **THE QUATERMASS CONCLUSION**. We only await a release of the BBC's **QUATERMASS II** (preferably with the two surviving episodes of **THE QUATERMASS EXPERIMENT** and the radio serial **THE QUATERMASS MEMOIRS** as extras) for the whole of the boffin's saga to be available. Considered in the context of the series, Hammer's **XPERIMENT** is notably the only Quatermass appearance *not* scripted by his creator. Even more than the casting of hardboiled





Yank Brian Donlevy in place of the original's British professor (Reginald Tate), this explains why he is a different character here than elsewhere. This Quatermass is part of the problem, not the solution: Mrs. Carroon's explicit motivation for kidnapping ailing astronaut Victor Carroon from the hospital is to get her husband a life "away from *him!*"; and Donlevy's blockish thug strides determinedly throughout, rude to everyone who tries to help or hinder and finally committed to return to the experiment in the same way Hammer's Baron Frankenstein would at the end of several films to come. In **QUATERMASS 2**, which Kneale *did* co-script, Donlevy plays a warmer, more self-doubting, intellectual character—which suggests he has learned something from the events of the first film, even if the first performance insists this is precisely what he isn't capable of.

Intriguingly, as revealed in the insert booklet, scenarist Richard Landau originally retained Quatermass' nationality and character from the TV serial but worked the role of his sidekick Briscoe into a part tailor-made for the American co-star obligatory in Hammer's mid-'50s product. In the event, the Yank got the top job and co-billing status went to Jack Warner, then a bigger name in the UK than Donlevy for his film, radio and TV work. The underrated David King-Wood winds up making Briscoe one of many strong background characters, even looking a little like Tate's Quatermass as he shows real empathy with the human cost of the experiment. A later Guest-Kneale collaboration, **THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN**, develops the American-British conflict at script and casting level by replacing the Welsh antagonist (Stanley Baker) of Kneale's TV play "The Creature"

with an imported American star (Forrest Tucker) who plays a far more explicitly villainous role than Donlevy does in **THE QUATERMASS XPERIMENT**, though the complexity of the character renders Tucker's Tom Friend more ambiguously sympathetic than Donlevy's straight-ahead sacrifice-anything fry-the-alien-and-start-again rocket man.

A few other notes, to add to the thoughts and comments of our previous reviewers: 1.) Carried over from Kneale's work is an unusual emphasis on people in all walks of life—firemen, policemen, scientists, bureaucrats, film lab techs, nurses, private detectives, zookeepers, chemists, TV producers—doing their jobs well, even if often at cross-purposes; this combines with director Val Guest's canny casting of all the bit-roles with actors who can fill out a few lines to convince as real people to make the film not only credible but affecting, and serves to render Donlevy's stern fanatic even more inhuman and inhumane. 2.) Richard Wordsworth is so startlingly good at portraying the pathetic/terrifying Carroon, especially in the James Whale-like scene with the little girl (Jane Asher), one wonders why Hammer didn't consider him as an alternative to the unknown Christopher Lee when casting the Creature in **THE CURSE OF FRANKENSTEIN**—though room was found for him in **THE REVENGE OF FRANKENSTEIN**, not as a monster but as a semi-comic Greek chorus. 3.) Harping on a VW running thread, we wonder if Quatermass' space-shot, with its crew influenced by cosmic rays and turned inhuman, was the seed for the origin of Marvel's **THE FANTASTIC FOUR**? Or were Stan Lee and Jack Kirby

thinking of the Thing-like transformation suffered by an astronaut in the Quatermass imitation **FIRST MAN INTO SPACE**?

The extras are a UK trailer for **QUATERMASS AND THE PIT** and a 7m on-camera chat between Val Guest and interviewer Marcus Hearn that serves as a curtain-raiser for their feature-length commentary track. The opening of the commentary reprises a lot from this chat, but then gets into far more detail. The sprightly Guest keeps his end up with good humor in the ongoing debate with Kneale over the casting of Donlevy, provides snippets of information about almost every face that appears onscreen (identifying not only the players but who they were married to) and gives detailed reminiscences of the circumstances of shooting practically every scene (Hearn is quick to give addresses for surviving locations if anyone plans a Quatermass holiday). Guest isn't free of a tendency to espouse conventional sentiments—the often-repeated blather about preferring to make "science fact" than "science fiction" is as patronizing and ill-informed as ever—but he generously spreads credit around the whole team, pointing up contributions from all the major behind-the-scenes personnel (with the odd exception of unmentioned co-scenarist Landau).

Whatever ground isn't covered in the commentary is picked up in one of the best insert booklets we've ever found inside a slipcase: a beautifully-illustrated and designed background essay by Hearn and Jonathan Rigby that extends to a one-page bibliography of sources.

**THE QUATERMASS XPERIMENT** is available from Xploited Cinema (see Sources), priced at \$24.95.







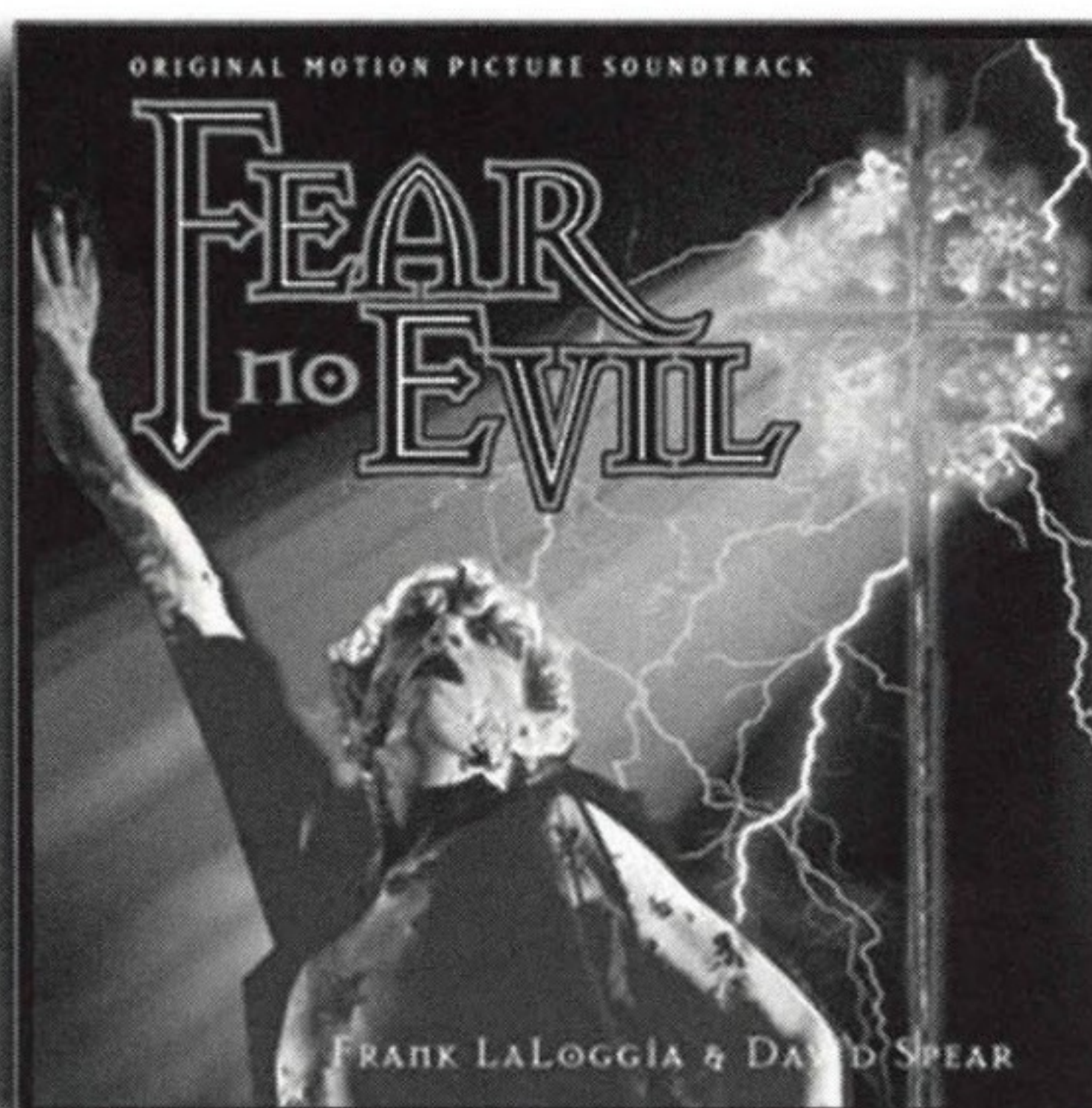
*By Douglas E. Winter*

## *Fear No Evil*

**F**ew motion picture directors have shown real merit as film musicians. Alejandro Amenábar is arguably the best living composer/director, although John Carpenter is without doubt the most popular, and their talents have been showcased recently in a grey market release of Amenabar's sublime music, co-written with Mariano Marín, for *Abre los Ojos* [US: **OPEN YOUR EYES**] (Anonymous CD-R, 17 tracks, 45m 50s) and a gorgeously remastered "New Expanded Edition" of **ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK** (Silva America SSD 1110, \$17.99, 57m 17s).

Percepto Records celebrates another member of this elite, Frank LaLoggia, with a limited edition pressing of the complete score of LaLoggia's first film as director and composer, **FEAR NO EVIL** (Percepto 013, \$19.95, 16 tracks, 37m 34s). Previously available only in a promotional vinyl LP that tailed the film's release in 1981, the music is extended by more than 7m on CD and accompanied by LaLoggia's original liner notes, as well as a new, finely illustrated essay by Daniel Schweiger.

Although **FEAR NO EVIL** is less than satisfactory as cinema—attributable, the liner notes urge, to the editorial interference of distributor Avco Embassy—its score is memorable. At a time when horror film music had succumbed to the influence of electronica—courtesy of



Goblin, Tangerine Dream, and Carpenter—LaLoggia insisted on a fully orchestrated score that would spin Bernard Herrmann and his heir apparent Pino Donaggio into the realm of the Satanic. After writing the initial cues on a synthesizer, LaLoggia approached Elmer Bernstein orchestrator David Spear, who charted the music into symphonic form while adding cues of his own. Although hamstrung by limited funds and a small orchestra, the composers created music that transcended the film and remains vital today.

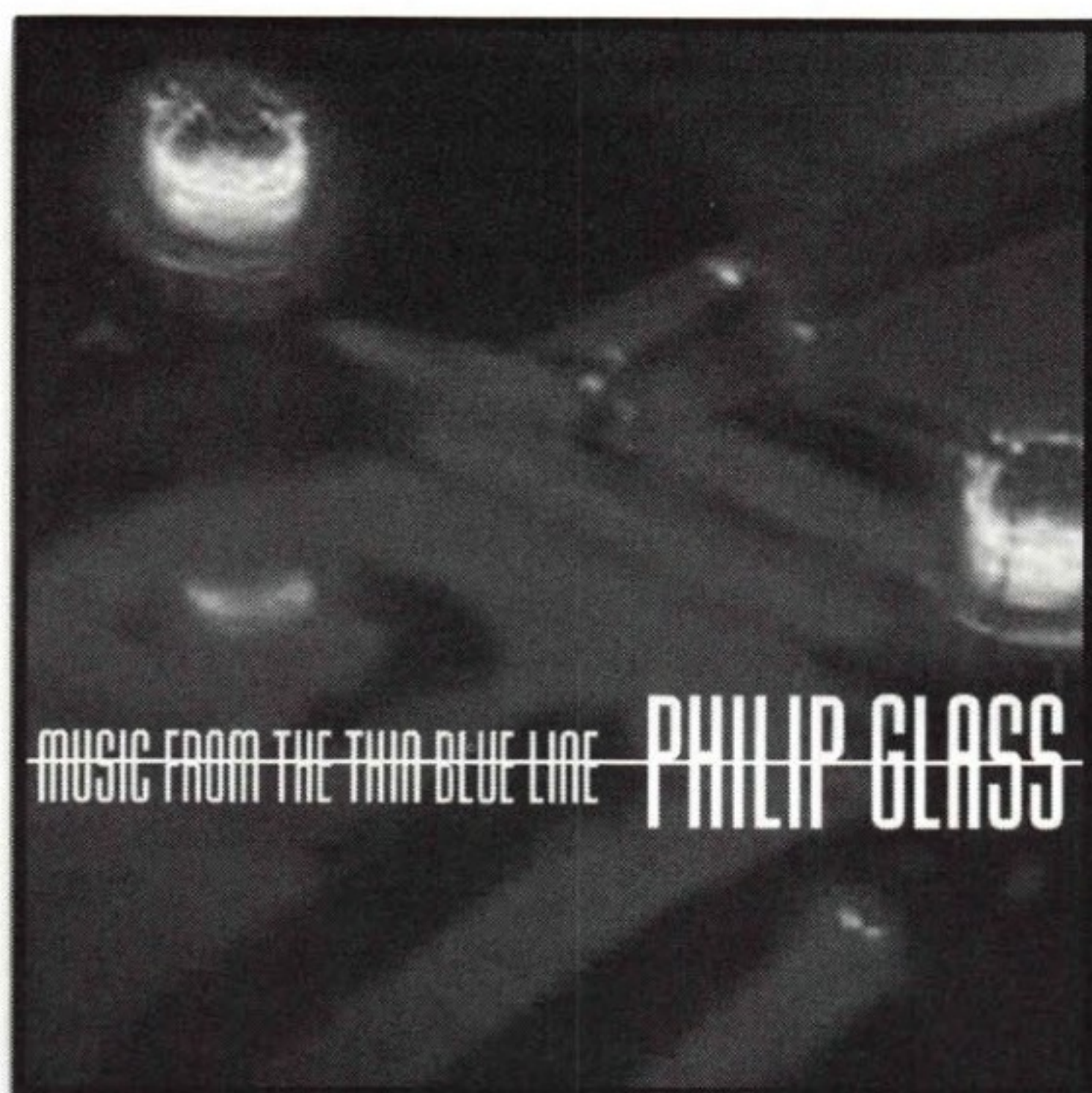
After his difficult experience with Avco Embassy, LaLoggia maintained total control over his next project, **LADY IN WHITE** (1988), and produced a far superior film—and his best score, which was first available on a Dutch CD issued by Southeast Records in 1996 and is presently part of Elite's Special Edition DVD of the film.

For more information about **FEAR NO EVIL** and to order the CD, visit [www.percepto.com](http://www.percepto.com).

## *Send in the Clown*

Visits to the local Blockbuster reveal a new twist in the serial killer genre: serial films, each named for its provocative perp—**DAHMER**, **GEIN**, **SPECK**, **GACY**. What sets the latter apart from the pack is its effective and intelligent electronic/symphonic score, composed and performed by Erik Godal and Mark Fontana of The Blue Hawaiians (Pascal 88009-2, \$16.00, 29 tracks, 42m 18s). I'm not clowning around here:





This is genuinely great stuff that channels Bernard Herrmann into the new century, armed with synths and a sharkskin suit.

**GACY** is the first soundtrack issued on Pascal Records, an LA-based indie label that specializes in genre-bending instrumental music: Spaghetti surf rock for those haunted nights when your back's against the wall, a martini in one hand, a .45 in the other. Think: The Ventures scoring **KISS ME DEADLY**. Then think again. Think: The Blue Hawaiians, once-upon-a-time house band for the Lava Lounge. Or Jetpack, a one-man guitar-slinger who levitates The Hollies' "Bus Stop" into a surf anthem. Or Double Naught Spy Car, worthy of a testimonial from James Ellroy.

Check out the Pascal catalog for yourself at [www.pascalrecords.com](http://www.pascalrecords.com) or by dropping them a line at 11684 Venture Boulevard #906, Studio City CA 91604—where you can also pick up the **GACY** soundtrack for \$16.00 (domestic) and \$22.00 (international), postage paid.

## *Out of Focus*

*Buyer beware.* Three years into the 21st Century, it's genuinely unsettling for a reviewer of compact discs to have to write those words. With digital recording techniques so pervasive that it's possible for almost anyone with a home computer to record and "clean" music from vinyl or tape, it's implicit that we should expect and receive quality recordings when we put down dollars for commercial CDs. In recent years, your Audio

Watchdog has rarely found a disc (other than a bootleg) whose sound quality was an issue. Imagine my surprise, then, upon spinning up the accompaniment for Paul Schrader's Bob Crane apologia, **AUTO FOCUS** (Sony Sanctuary/Combustion 06076-84577-2, \$17.99, 16 tracks, 48m 05s). Putting aside the chagrin of hearing yet another song compilation (which squeezes out the fine Angelo Badalamenti underscore, represented here in only three cues), this disc sounds like it was produced by a grade-schooler who downloaded the tunes from the Internet. Sanctuary, a subsidiary of the mighty BMG, spared every expense by using upteenth generation sources without giving a thought to remastering. In a rude throwback to the early years of compact discs, every song recorded before the digital age suffers from neglect: The Four Tops' "Helpless" hisses worse than the cast of **SSSSSSS**; the brass on The O'Kaysions' "(I'm A) Girl Watcher" distorts rudely and repeatedly at the top end; and Barbara Mason's "Yes I'm Ready" literally warbles, as if taken from an audiocassette left out in the sun. Don't waste your money or your time, unless it's to voice a very loud complaint.

There is, however, some good news. One of the great mistakes in recent film music history—the mind-numbing decision by Nonesuch to issue the 1989 "soundtrack" for Errol Morris' **THE THIN BLUE LINE** as a spoken-word disc, with commentary and interviews from the film tracked over (and thus obscuring) a superlative score by Philip Glass—has been remedied by Glass' private label, Orange Mountain Music (OM0007, \$17.99, 19 tracks, 55m 32s). Like Orange Mountain's earlier, beneath-the-radar release of **CANDYMAN** [see VW 80:76-77], **THE THIN BLUE LINE** is expansive, although less than forthcoming about its pedigree. The liner notes by producer Don Christensen note that Morris, himself a Julliard-trained cellist, required "many rewrites" from Glass, and the CD includes unused material along with the final score; but as with **CANDYMAN**, cues have been remixed—and perhaps even re-recorded. The music itself is sublime, however, and obviously this is a welcome and long-overdue release. For more information visit [www.orangemountainmusic.com](http://www.orangemountainmusic.com) and [www.philipglass.com](http://www.philipglass.com).

*The Audio Watchdog may be contacted on line at [OnEyeDog@aol.com](mailto:OnEyeDog@aol.com). Review and promotional materials should be sent c/o Vale House, 2495 Oakton Hills Drive, Oakton VA 22124.*





## BIBLIO WATCHDOG

# FORGOTTEN HORRORS 3 DR. TURNER'S HOUSE OF HORRORS

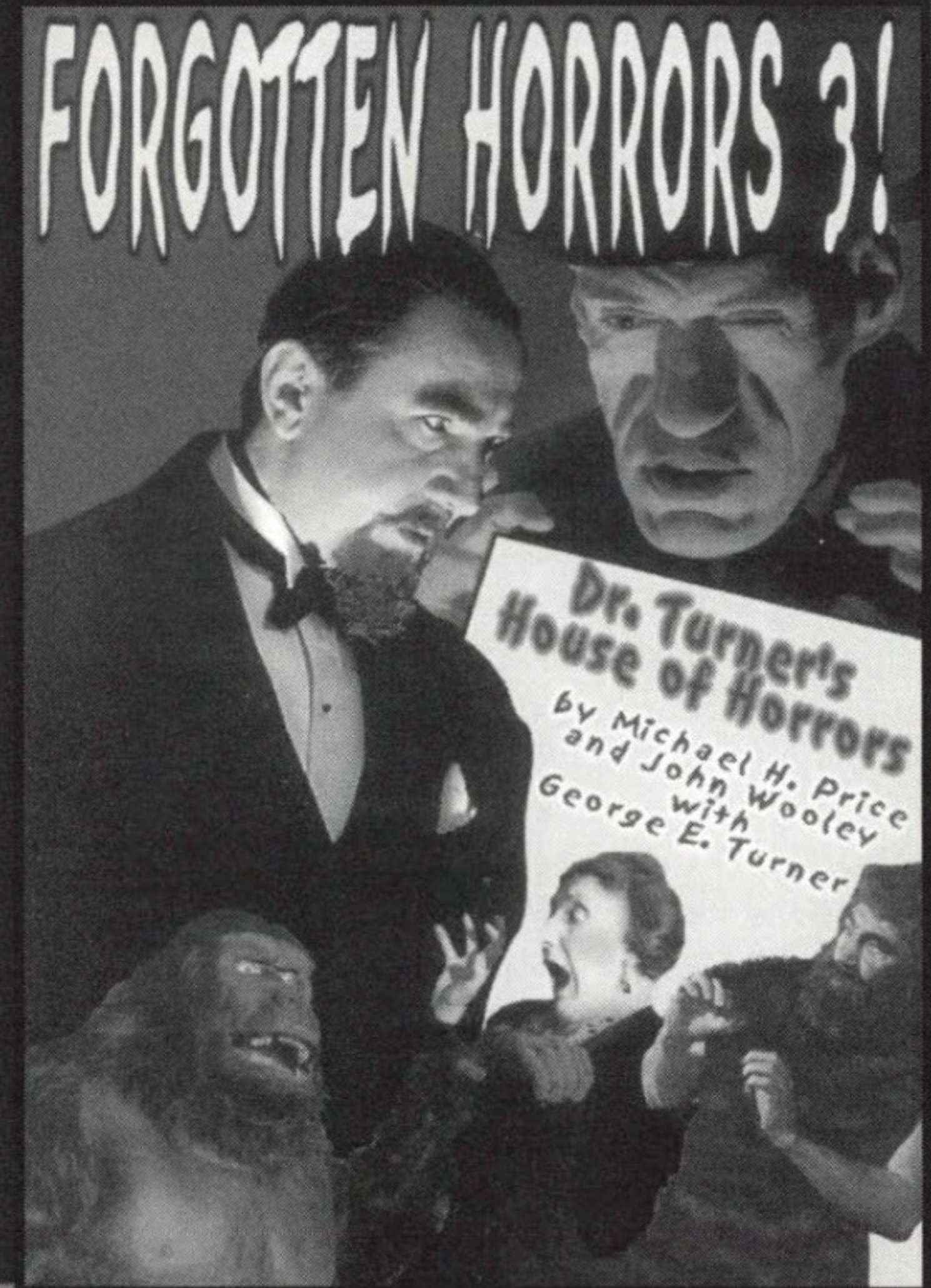
By Michael H. Price and John Wooley  
with George E. Turner  
Luminary Press  
www.midmar.com

9721 Britinay Lane, Baltimore MD 21234  
410- 665-1198, 224 pp., \$20.00 (softcover)  
plus \$4.00 shipping from the publisher.

**Reviewed by  
Anthony Ambrogio**

**T**his third volume in the ongoing FORGOTTEN HORRORS (FH) series will not disappoint admirers of the first two. Once again, Michael Price—now ably assisted by new partner John Wooley and abetted by the posthumous comments of his erstwhile colleague and mentor, George Turner (as indicated by the book's subtitle)—has put together a collection of minor-studio and one-shot titles, “placing conventional monster movies, mad-scientist melodramas and other such easily pigeon-holed, genre-fied pieces in a larger context alongside naturalistic and/or stylized crime yarns, propaganda agitators, exotic documentaries, weird Westerns and surreal comedies and patently unclassifiable flights of eccentricity.”

On first glance, some of this material might seem old hat. After all, Tom Weaver's *POVERTY ROW HORRORS* (McFarland, 1993) examines in depth 31 *bona fide* 1940s horror films and even includes an appendix of another 34 “Exclusions, Borderline Inclusions, and a Few Late '40s Films”—all of which (1940-1946, anyway) are covered in FH 2 and 3. (FH 4 will undoubtedly mention Weaver's post-1946 picks.) But, despite his accomplishment, Weaver (who receives an acknowledgement in FH 3) was tilling a furrow ploughed by Turner and Price's ground-breaking work: the subtitle of their first FH (1979,



rev. 1986) is, in fact, “Early Talkie Chillers from *Poverty Row*” (our italics).

Not only has this old-hat material been extensively reblocked, but FH proves to be a regular haberdashery. Whereas Weaver (validly, for his purposes) limited his study to the “genre-fied” films that FH also covers, Price/Wooley/Turner feel that “a wider, and wilder vista of cultural rediscovery and plain viewing pleasure awaits the enthusiast who is willing to look beyond the obvious.” And FH's inclusiveness means that it contains surprises



on nearly every page—descriptions and analyses of films usually overlooked. VW readers, used to a generous helping of Spaghetti Westerns, sexploitation, and martial arts films alongside their horror/fantasy/sf, should fill right up on this smorgasbord of comedies, cowboy pictures, crime dramas, exploitation, *film noir*, jungle adventures, mysteries, war films, and even the occasional conventional monster movie.

Examples of material discussed include **CRAZY KNIGHTS** (1944), featuring the unlikely trio of Billy Gilbert, Shemp Howard, and Maxie Rosenbloom; **WILD HORSE PHANTOM** (1944), starring Buster Crabbe and Fuzzy St. John, with a cameo appearance by 1940's Devil Bat; **CRIME, INC.** (1945), one of Lionel Atwill's last films; **CHILD BRIDE** (1943), with its ample and sometimes underage nudity; Edgar G. Ulmer's **DETOUR** (1945, reviewed in VW 70:42); the gorilla thrillers **NABONGA** (1944), **WHITE PONGO** (1945), and **THE WHITE GORILLA** (1945); the "Charlie Chan" films of Sidney Toler and Victor Sen Young; **QUEEN OF BURLESQUE** (1946), with Evelyn Ankers in the title role; **HITLER'S MADMAN** (1943), Douglas Sirk's low-budget version of Reinhard Heydrich's assassination and the Lidice massacre (cf. Fritz Lang's big-budget **HANGMEN ALSO DIE** [1943]); **DEAD MEN WALK** (1943); **THE APE MAN** (1943); **THE MONSTER MAKER** (1944, cf. VW 41:69); **RETURN OF THE APE MAN** (1944); **THE VAMPIRE'S GHOST** (1945); **STRANGLER OF THE SWAMP** (1946, cf. VW 57:18); **FACE OF MARBLE** (1946), **VALLEY OF THE ZOMBIES** (1946), etc.

FH 3 also offers a helpful "Recommended Video Sources" appendix, and the authors encourage readers to assess available forgotten horrors for themselves, although VW purists might cringe at their statement, "We don't really care to discriminate between pristine, supposedly definitive editions and just plain old watchable dubs. It is too easy, in the struggle for digital perfection-plus-commentary-tracks, to forget the simple pleasure of kicking back and watching some movie upon which one never expected to cast (or strain) one's eyes."

One might think that, as the series moves forward in time, there would be fewer films which could be considered "forgotten." On the contrary. While **FH: THE DEFINITIVE EDITION** (Midnight Marquee Press, 1999) covers eight years and 147 titles, and **FH 2: BEYOND THE HORROR BAN** (Midnight Marquee Press, 2001) covers six years and 149 titles, **FH 3**

covers a mere four years... but 165 titles. And, as Price notes, these films were primarily the output of only three studios. Gone are the *Invincible*, *Tiffany*, *Majestic*, and *Mascot* releases of earlier years, replaced by poverty row's trio of survivors—*Mono-gram*, *PRC*, and *Republic*—whose prodigious 1940s turnout matched the major studios' output, illustrating wartime movie audiences' insatiability for pulp entertainment.

**FH 2** celebrated the talents of Mantan Moreland, whom it mentions almost as many times as Poverty Row's superstar, Bela Lugosi. Lugosi and Moreland take *Win and Show* in **FH 3**, too, but a surprise in third place (tied with John Carradine) is Veda Ann Borg, who features prominently in 11 forgotten horrors (and two luminous cheesecake stills) as supporting victim, leading lady, or *femme fatale*. Other performers and directors who receive their share of ink in **FH 3** are Erich von Stroheim, William Beaudine, Sam Newfield, and Edgar G. Ulmer.

The book's only omission is in its entry for Ulmer's **STRANGE ILLUSION**, which doesn't mention that movie's indebtedness to Shakespeare's *HAMLET*—perhaps because the authors thought the link too tenuous, although that connection is what brought us to the film in the first place. (See Rebecca & Sam Umland's review in VW 85:65 for a discussion of the *HAMLET* influence.)

Once again, **FH** publishers Susan & Gary J. Svehla have created an attractive showcase for the prose and pictures. Their only faults? Reducing the size of this volume from 7.5" x 10" to 7" x 10", so that the set of volumes now stand unevenly on one's bookshelf.

As does the previous volume, this one begins (after several authors' prefaces) with an "Annotations, Marginalia, and Addenda" section, supplementing information about titles already discussed and adding titles that were overlooked. Price is the first to admit that **FH: THE DEFINITIVE EDITION** was not quite so definitive. As more data emerges about these films, as more are rediscovered for reviewing, the list naturally expands. Once the series concludes, a truly definitive **FH**, combining all the books in one massive, up-to-date volume, would not be amiss.

Until then, Price promises to continue the series with **FH 4**, **5**, and so on, until he and co-author Wooley reach the cut-off date of 1985 (the year of **BLOOD CULT**, the first direct-to-video feature, which effectively marked the end of the theatrical B-film). We can't wait till they get to *Howco* and *Crown International*.





# THE LETTERBOX



## VAMPIRE MEN OF THE LOST SEX RAY SCENE

I loved Shane Dallmann's article on Image Entertainment's "Blood Collection," but he made a tiny error when discussing the video history of **HORROR OF THE BLOOD MONSTERS** [VW95:39]. In the late 1990s, Very Strange Video released two Adamson films, **DRACULA VS. FRANKENSTEIN** and **HORROR OF THE BLOOD MONSTERS** (under the title **VAMPIRE MEN OF THE LOST PLANET**), and another Independent-International title, **THE BLOODY DEAD**.

**VAMPIRE MEN OF THE LOST PLANET**, in this version, is missing one scene. The sex ray scene between Robert Dix and Vicki

Volante is completely omitted from the print. So when reading about this particular scene in reviews of the film, I was dumbfounded. It's nowhere to be seen on the Very Strange Video version!

**Casey Scott**  
**Fairfax VA**

## THE BEAST SPAYED?

There are a few small but significant inaccuracies in Richard Harland Smith's review of **THE BEAST** [*La Bête*, 1975] in VW 96:47. He states that a regime rejected the film completely. Then he adds that censor James Ferman was unwilling to make the cuts necessary to issue an "X" certificate, instead advising the distributor to try submitting

it to the Greater London Council. They followed German's advice, but only after removing 2m of footage themselves before submission. The GLC passed this version without further cuts.

The BBFC did eventually pass **THE BEAST** uncut in February 2001 for a theatrical re-release, but both this and the version subsequently issued on video and DVD are missing approximately 4m of expository material. Cult Epics' DVD appears to present the same time-compressed transfer as Nouveaux Pictures British DVD, suggesting

*MAD MONSTER PARTY?'s  
Baron Boris von Frankenstein  
and Francesca love hearing  
from their correspondents...  
and so do we!*



that Smith is incorrect in claiming it as "fully uncut," even though all the controversial sexual footage is intact.

**Daniel Stillings**  
South Yorkshire, England

### THE PLAY'S THE THING

Just dropping you guys another short letter with another discovery I made recently. I came across the John Carl Buechler directed film, **DEEP FREEZE** (2003), and was stunned to notice that the film, whilst also being set in Antarctica à la **THE THING**, had blatantly used all the exterior shots from the John Carpenter 1982 remake of **THE THING**. The end credits do not mention this in any way at all, so I wondered if anyone else had spotted this.

**David Penny**  
e-mail

*Major studios quite willingly sell footage from their older productions to small companies producing DTV features and there is rarely an end crawl acknowledgement of that fact in the new production.*

*This likely explains the recycling you mentioned.*

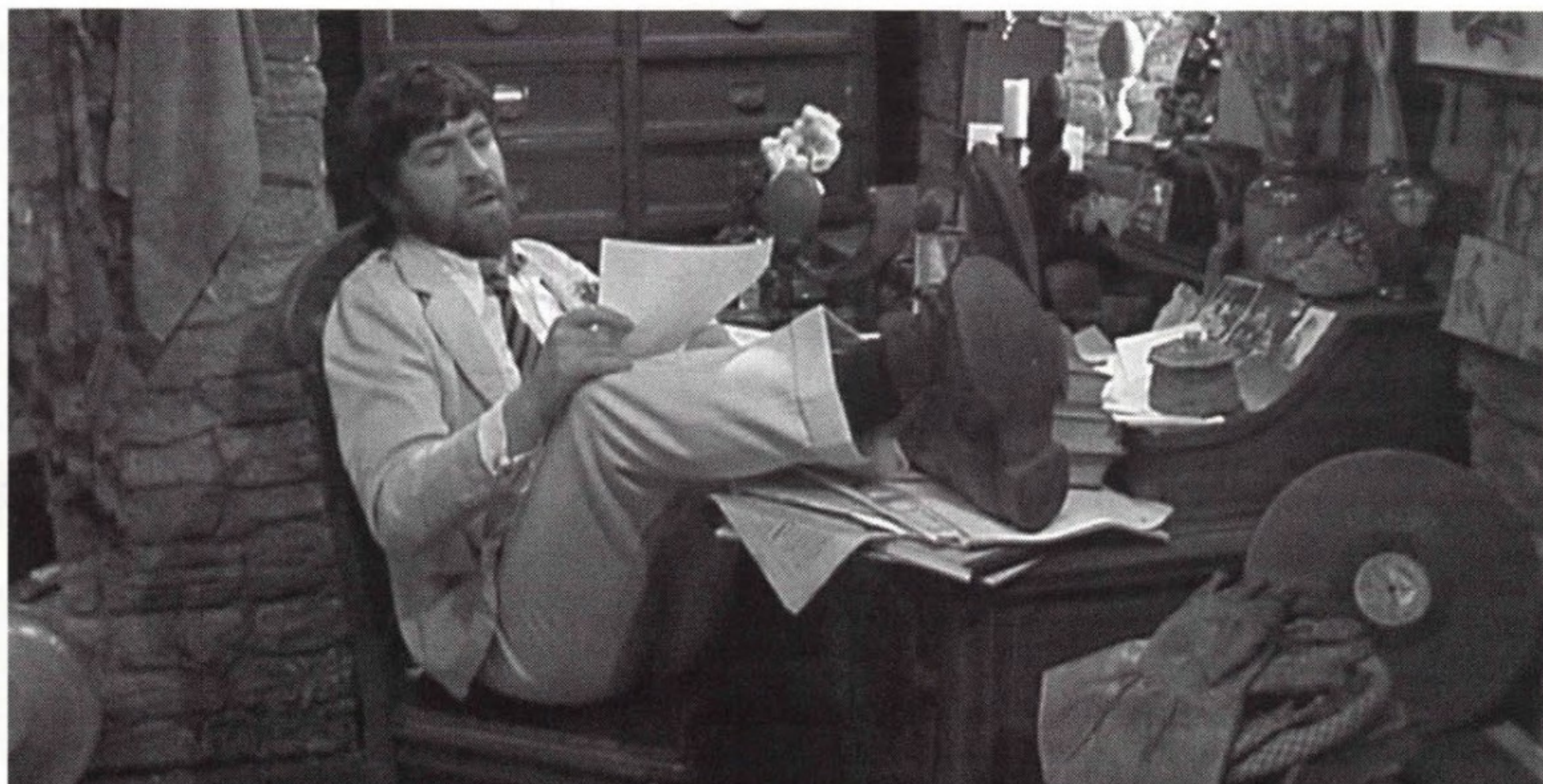
### PICKING AT STRAW

Just a consumer warning about Criterion's supposedly uncut DVD of **STRAW DOGS**. It appears that approximately 1s (one second) has been cut from the notorious rape scene that was previously included in the Image Entertainment laserdisc and Anchor Bay Entertainment DVD releases. The missing bit occurs almost subliminally, just after David puts his coat back on to return home after the hunt. The excised second shows Amy clearly being sodomized by Norman Scutt. There is no reference to its absence in Stephen Prince's audio commentary either, suggesting that he might be unaware of the edit offered on this previous version. If you have any contacts at Criterion perhaps they could explain their decision to release this obviously incomplete transfer.

**Meredith Usher**  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

*I noted the presence of this subliminal shot when I reviewed **STRAW DOGS** back in VW 39:69. It consists of only two frames, which would make the shot roughly 1/12th of a second in duration. In other words, it requires an exceptional acuity of vision to notice it. Considering that the shot appears within a cross-cutting sequence at the beginning of a scene change, the presence of these frames look—to me—more accidentally included in the earlier releases than a deliberate part of the cutting continuity. The print used for those earlier releases may have been struck from the source print that Peckinpah was cutting when he was bartering with the MPAA, frame-by-frame, to keep the shot. If a shot has been censored until there are only two frames remaining, it makes more sense to cut those frames than to keep them and introduce a hiccup into an otherwise sensuous montage. For this reason, I suspect the presence of these frames in the earlier*

*Rupert Birkin (Alan Bates) daydreams about taking a leave of absence from his job in WOMEN IN LOVE... and so do we!*





releases was accidental and that the Criterion disc, though it doesn't include them, still qualifies as the definitive assembly.

I forwarded your question, Meredith, directly to our friends at Criterion, and got the following answer from Marc Walkow: "Kim [Hendrickson, the disc's producer] thinks we got our film materials directly from Buena Vista (the licensor); we did a new HD film-to-video transfer for the release. We didn't really compare our transfer to the previous Anchor Bay one, except perhaps only cursorily. Obviously, the running time wouldn't have been affected by those missing frames."

### THE TIM LUCAS SEAL OF APPROVAL?

Sometimes I'll see a DVD (**A VIRGIN AMONG THE LIVING DEAD**, for example) and wonder if I should trust this release of the film. Whenever I see your name on it somewhere (commentary or liner notes, usually), it tends to put me at ease. Should it? Does the fact that you contributed to a disc mean you endorse that particular release?

**Paul Iannone**  
e-mail

Not necessarily, but on the whole, I've been very pleased with the releases I've annotated. When I agree to write DVD liner notes, it's usually because I am knowledgeable about the people involved in making it; it doesn't necessarily mean that I would recommend the film in question to one and all. **ROY COLT & WINCHESTER JACK** is a good case in point; it's a Mario Bava film, but not one of the

better ones. Even so, I had quotes and information that would add to the overall quality of the package, and make the disc more tempting for the undecided buyer to acquire; after looking at an advance tape, I was also able to alert Image to some subtitled errors, which they promptly fixed, so the end result was better for my involvement. I'm very pleased with that disc, but it's not a film I could watch endlessly.

**DEVIL KISS** carries my byline due to an editing glitch; my contribution wasn't much more than a packaging synopsis, which is what Image asked me to provide. My notes have to be delivered early, long before first test discs are available for viewing, so there's no way of knowing at the time of my involvement how the final product is going to turn out. But sometimes an advance cassette is enough to make me believe that something great could result.

I recently wrote the liner notes for some Jess Franco titles forthcoming from Blue Underground: **THE BLOODY JUDGE**, **THE BLOOD OF FU MANCHU** and **THE CASTLE OF FU MANCHU**. I wouldn't include any of these in Franco's Top 10, but judging from the advance tapes I viewed, Blue Underground has done a remarkable job of restoring them and I now have a better appreciation of all three. Their version of **THE BLOODY JUDGE** is so complete, it is actually a version that has never been seen before anywhere in the world! And to answer your implicit question, yes, I would endorse Image's **A VIRGIN AMONG THE LIVING DEAD** DVD.



## SOURCES

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